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**NANDALAL BOSE  
AND INDIAN PAINTING**

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

**M. N. ROY**

**THE HUMANIST PHILOSOPHER**

# NANDALAL BOSE AND INDIAN PAINTING

Ramyansu Sekhar Das

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Discussion on art may lead one to its philosophy and that of different countries. Hence I was led to so-called International Modern Art of which I am no admirer. I, however, tried to get a clear idea of it from books like *Modern French Painters* by R. H. Wilenski, *The History of Impressionism* by John Rewald, *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting* by M. Seuphor, *How to Understand Modern Art* by G. A. Flanagan, *Social History of Art* by A. Hauser, *A Dictionary of Modern Painters* by R. Maillard and C. Lake, along with many other books and articles such as those of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

I am thankful to Acharya Nandalal Bose, the late principal Romendranath Chakravarty, Sri Manindrabhusan Gupta for their kind co-operation. I am indebted to the authorities of China Bhaban, Santiniketan, for their courtesy in permitting me to print the reproductions of their wall paintings.

Special thanks go to Sri Prabhat Kumar Ghosh for helping me with proofs, paper and suggestions, some of which I could not accept.

The cover has been designed by Sri Sudhansu Ghosh for which I am grateful.

Ramyaansu Sekhar Das

Calcutta,  
1. 12. 58



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Randall Bore  
Sauli'nikau  
11/10/1955

# NANDALAL BOSE AND INDIAN PAINTING

## INTRODUCTION

IT IS NECESSARY to mention here that after writing all the chapters I went to Santiniketan to visit Nandalal Bose. That was 11th October, 1955. When I went to see him it was an autumn afternoon. Afternoon classes of Santiniketan had just started under the trees.

In front of the artist's house autumn flowers were in blossom. On another side a small paddy field was full of green rice. There were patches of season flowers in his yard, without any fencing. Of course some cocks and hens were moving about rather freely.

I waited for the artist at 3 P.M. which was the time fixed earlier. A dark thin medium size man entered. That was Nandalal Bose, who was about seventy three. He told me that he could not remember dates of his life and added humorously that the police during the British regime used to know more details of his life than he himself.

He, however, has his definite ideas about his art. He explained that his art had had emphasis on form rather than on colour.

He has an alert mind and acute intelligence. He did not like the idea that he ever consciously borrowed from any school of foreign painters. Some of the ideas might have, according to him, percolated into his art but that is immaterial. The growth and development of art count but not the process. He is a confirmed believer in Indian art in particular and Oriental art in general, inasmuch as they represent a linear art and try to see the inside of a thing rather than its external side. Conception of anatomy naturally arises. While the Western art aims at exact imitation of a thing, Oriental art would abhor the idea of exact representation of anatomy but would present the whole idea in few lines with emphasis on rhythm. Thus anatomy of a lion is

known to an Indian artist but he would not draw the whole figure of a lion but would represent the lion in lines showing its rhythm.

Similarly, the structure of a tree is known to an Indian artist but that would not be represented as such except its rhythm. This is a favourite subject of Nandalal who explained it to me through his drawings.

Regarding his temperamental difference with Abanindranath Tagore, he remarked that while Abanindranath was painter mainly of colour, he is one of forms.

Nandalal is a devotee of Indian Alankar Sastras and finds in it the noblest form of art analysis. He recalled that Sanskrit scholars were engaged in Government Art School in his days to study Alankar Sastras.

He is a man deeply attached to his Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and he feels great gratification in having satisfied him with his pictures.

Ideas of his art have close affinity with those of Tagore. He believes that an artist is no artist unless he has vision and if he draws a landscape successfully, he shows his power of vision. Hence he finds much to appreciate in Chinese paintings before the advent of Buddhism in China as well as in Japan. He is fond of drawing sketches and stated that his sketches were not like those of European artists. They express his impressions and he draws about ten to fifteen sketches a day. And while I was present, a group of boys came for sketches which he had made ready for them earlier with their names attached to each. He explained to me that he had been keeping close connection with Sishusadan of Santiniketan and the boys visit him for sketches which he readily supplies.

He regretted the tendency of imitation in modern Indian Art. The tendency of imitation has arisen from the fact that real freedom of thinking has not come. That is why withdrawal of foreign political power has revealed only the intellectual slavery in its gross form.

Nandalal is after all a lover of freedom in personal and

political life and shuns all forms of exhibitionism. But it appeared that he is not aware of the consequences of his ideas. He is not, moreover, aware of the logical development of his outlook on sociology or philosophy. He is aware of his broad cosmopolitanism and non-attachment to any religious dogma. He said that the idea of a flower is good enough for an artist to draw and he fully appreciated the Chinese and Japanese art in that respect.

But by temperament he is a serious man and he inclines towards serious subjects. And there he goes on to the complexities of Indian culture.

Nandalal is not highly self-conscious. He told me that he would write all about his art and would leave nothing for others to write. He finds pleasure in writing in Bengali about his colour and form but he seldom has spoken about his outlook on life. He has developed his art with such attention that he is not aware of the influences he has imbibed in the process. In this connection it must be noted that when I pointed out to him about Assyrian influence mentioned by Manindrabhusan Gupta, Nandalal felt a little surprised and annoyed. He replied in a metaphor that it was immaterial whether a man develops his health by consuming eggs or meat but development of health is of importance which bears no trace of egg or meat. Similarly, influences as traced by Romen Chakravarty have been denied by him. Assuming for argument's sake that there had been some influence on him, it was not possible for him to analyse those influences. The fact is that his outlook was formed under the impact of rebirth of Indian classical art and that he was always absorbed with that notion. He therefore told me, when I spoke of Impressionist influence, that Indian art too had elements of Impressionism. This statement indicates that he may not be completely unaware of the subtleties of the history of Impressionist movement of Europe though generally he is averse to what is called modern art. What he was concerned with was art which he studied and learnt from Indian painting and sculpture as well as folk art. His non-doctrinaire attitude

came from his study of different phases of Indian art. But because of his sensitivity to the modern world he has some spiritual affinity with modern art. Should there be any distinction between art and art on geographical basis? Perhaps geography is the cause of difference. Looking at the vast range of arts in ancient Egypt, Rome and Byzantium, one cannot but say that there is a basis of art growing on geographical background but that does not mean it loses a certain universal character. Art is always suggestive but Indian art developed certain sensibilities and it had philosophical background perhaps due to variety of philosophies in India. Nevertheless, it exists and it has the potentiality of developing further.

Trends of French art in the 19th and 20th centuries from the period of Impressionism show the restlessness as well as fusion of different artistic forces there. But it must be admitted that art in France did not have the same seriousness as Indian art had shown during the centuries of its growth. It does not further mean that Indian art has reached its dead end. It has still the potentiality of growth and development. Nandalal is one example of how an Indian artist can adapt himself to newer philosophies of life without making fuss about it. French art is the growth of French soil and from 19th century onward it is the expression of a restlessness which we find in her political and cultural life too. Perhaps it might be due to inadequate realization of French Revolution and bankruptcy of some vital institutions. Perhaps it was not so. But certain hollowness of ideas is certainly discernible. They have been discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Regarding ancient art, it is noteworthy that the ancient Egyptian art was mainly sepulchral but as Arpag Mekhitarian comments in 'Egyptian Painting': 'For all their piety the Egyptians enjoyed life and could not bear to think of being deprived in the next world of the amenities of their earthly existence.' (p. 152) Life and nature were the main sources of Roman painting of the ancient times. Amedeo Maiuri has remarked in 'Roman Painting': 'The nature, pure and simple, was one of the chief

sources of inspiration of Roman decorative art from the Augustan age onward.' (p. 129)

Mosaic art of ancient Byzantium relates to saints and martyrs of Christianity in superb blending of colours. Again, Chinese art had subtleties but it had never the philosophical seriousness as Indian art had. Chinese painting had mysteries and subtle lines but it could not even accept Buddhism in proper religious spirit. Chinese art of course enjoyed more respectability than art anywhere. But it was for the enjoyment of court and richer people. It had seldom the touch of mass mind.

To make the point clear, the following may be quoted from 'The Art and Architecture of Japan' by Robert Treat Paine and Alexander Soper (p. 3): 'To the Japanese the world was an object of beauty and of pleasure. The satisfaction and the gaiety which were basic were sometimes tinged with Buddhist ideas of transmigration or sometimes they reflected the ethical valuations of the Chinese. Japanese artists were seldom scholar gentlemen in the Chinese sense. They arose from court and temples and craft and professional schools.'

Indian art drew the attention of E. B. Havell for its educational importance to the mass mind. So Heinrich Zimmer comments: 'Indian art, besides documenting the history of a majestic civilization, opens a simple, delightful way into the timeless domain of Hindu spirit; for it renders in eloquent visual forms the whole message that India holds in keep for mankind.' (p. 1). Again: 'The luxuriant display of the great temples of pilgrimage is therefore readily legible script that conveys through an elaborate yet generally understood symbolism, not only the legends of popular cult, but simultaneously the profoundest teachings of Indian metaphysics.' (p. 12)

Zimmer concludes thus: 'In the popular crafts, however, the primitive realism of the fetish remained alive; as the art of the south slowly decayed, this archaic factor came again to the surface. . . . We do not know how far back into the Neolithic, or Paleolithic, the archetypes of the stark, emergent realism and fetishism of the art of the folk should be traced. A comparison

however of the posture of the sun in the Elephant Skin with that of the dancer of the Harappa suggests a vista of at least five thousand years.' (p. 362)

Leaving aside the exuberance of Havell and Zimmer it can be precisely stated that Indian art had got certain characteristics, whether good or bad, as distinguished from those of other countries. It is not a matter of superiority or inferiority but of pure fact. Nandalal Bose has imbibed that serious philosophical side of Indian art with a new outlook of his own. He has succeeded in tracing the decay of Indian art and therein lies his greatness despite the fact that he is not fully aware of it. He has a keen historical sense.

Anyway, I had another occasion of meeting Nandalal Bose on 24th November, 1955 at his Calcutta residence in a quiet corner of Ballygunj. I accompanied Manindra Bhusan Gupta there. It was a pretty little house simply decorated. Nandalal was sitting wearing a toga-like cloth. His purpose in visiting Calcutta was treatment of his eyes. But his wife explained to us that doctors had been unable to find anything wrong with his eyes although she found only his fear of losing his eye-sight. Nandalal laughed.

As usual he was full of humour. He reiterated jokingly that facts of his life were better known to police authorities than to himself. He pointed to Manibabu who happens to know some of the details of his life. He himself, however, vainly searched for some papers containing the date of his birth. In the presence of Nandalal one has the feeling that though he is a lively man sparkling with humour, he is a bit melancholy. He is not mindful of his surroundings except what he thinks necessary for his art. He finds delight in art which usually takes the form of sketches about all he cares for.

It would be proper to mention that Nandalal's wife had a silent role to play in his development as an artist. She seems to be quite sensitive about it, as she explained that the wife had to face the ordeal in case of illness.

It is wrong to say that Nandalal is self-effacing, a term which

does not comprehend his artistic outlook. Nandalal the man and artist has no conflict. He is careful of his art and conscious of the subject and its reaction on his mind. He explained that drawing the figure of even a goddess has a different effect on the mind of an artist than that of a male figure. He knows the technique of his art and its superiority over that of cheap, modern and folk art.

Indeed he has a rare self-confidence which defies vilification and publicity. He has the gratification of drawing according to his conception. Dates and other details are of little consequence to him.

It must be noted that a large section of art critics of England and U.S.A., is not kindly disposed towards modern art due to its isolation and ugliness and secondly because of its absorption of foreign elements such as Oriental and African influences. Their objection becomes stronger when 20th century Cubism, Expressionism and Surrealism reveal their hideousness. Some of them have traced the source of this ugliness to uncertainty of political and economic conditions of the world after World War I, when 20th century properly began. They do not fail to point out that Impressionism is the culmination of a process starting from Renaissance but Post-impressionism has let loose the forces of disintegration, and tonality of music and reality to life have gone. Dreadful horrors of life have given birth to fantasies in art and Nazism, Fascism and Communism took their tolls.

But no dispassionate student of art can deny that Impressionism is the starting point and their philosophy came from Schopenhauer who defined art as the 'deliverance from the will, as the sedative which brings the appetite and passions to silence'. Then raw nature lost its importance and art began to be a subject of the elite in an age of democracy. Urban life began to be more spiritual, and urban culture *vie factice* and more fascinating. Nature became ugly and it is art which makes it enjoyable. The striking feature of the modern world of technology is the emphasis on urban life and Impressionism is the art of city life. It describes the changeability, the nervous



rhythm, the sudden, sharp but always ephemeral impressions of the city life. Like the Gothic and the Romantic, it signifies a change in European art. But Impressionism also created Bohemianism to outlandish places. Hence started Post-impressionism and ultimately Surrealism, Expressionism and abstract Expressionism. Picasso is characteristic by his constant change of style and he has drawn few landscapes. Fauves (meaning wild beast) carried the trends of Van Gogh and Gauguin and integrated them to 20th century tradition. Fauvism created values of surface richness and emotionally exciting colour but they have in varying degrees turned from perceptual to conceptual approach to a world of imagination and the subconscious which is in 'direct opposition to the main European trend from Giotto to Impressionism'.

Again German Expressionism was a manifestation of subjective feeling toward objective reality. The true Germans had been averse to Impressionism as something unsuited to the translucent Northern temperament. It was an art in direct line of descent from earlier German painting and engraving and especially bold colour, emphasis on subject matter and transcendental tones. It was contemporaneous with Fauves in Paris.

But at the same time machine art progressed and it has a similarity with handicraft of traditional times in its simplicity and elimination of ornament with a sensitive feeling for materials.

With this background we find that Nandalal's emphasis is on 'inner artistic significance'. He says: 'In a picture the artist creates the language of undoubted reality and we are satisfied that we see them'. His fundamental difference is in the approach. He is not following Schopenhauer and Mallarme. He is not terror-stricken by war and devastation. He has faith in some basic values and he is fully aware of the Indian tradition of many centuries. That attitude exposes his puerile critics as amateurish vilifiers and their enthusiasm for *neo-potua* art as somewhat pretentious. With development of various departments of sciences, matter has been spiritualized and spiritual materialized, as Sir James Jeans has put it. Philosophy is

keeping pace with it and art is fumbling with its Cubism and Surrealism in sculpture and painting.

Nandalal has recorded his awareness of the contemporary world. But his difference of approach would be clearer when we compare his attitude with that of Carols Giedion-Welcher remarking in his introduction to 'Contemporary Sculpture': 'In contrast to that of the preceding age our own signifies the subordination of the individual and his reacclimatization to nature and experience.' Nandalal has obviously not accepted this subordination of individual theory which is causing so much of restlessness and 'de-humanization' among the artistic coteries of the present day world.

Moreover, modern art is basically anti-literary and analytical. These artists were opposed to giving any title except for cataloguing. Its emphasis on design began with Cezanne and culminated in curvilinear Cubism of Braque and Picasso. Its other feature is expressiveness which can be found in ample measure from Van Gogh to Fauvists like Matisse and Expressionists like Klee and Chagall. Literary tendency returned with Surrealism.

Meanwhile, movements like 'Futurism' and 'Dadaism' are significant. Futurism preceded the rise of Fascism in Italy by a decade. Dadaism (meaning hobby horse) lasted from 1916 to 1921 and was the cause of meetings ending in confusion, though starting with simultaneous recitation of poems accompanied by music.

This movement is believed to have been caused by disillusionment and frustration caused by World War I, destroying art and architecture and innocent human lives, thereby exposing the hollowness of civilization. Dadaism preceded Surrealism.

But Dadaism is typical and represents the anguish of sensitive artists which underlies all the movements originating in Paris and having the philosophical approach of Schopenhauer, who himself was a philosopher of despair. Obviously Nandalal's approach is different. He is an artist of sobriety and not of violent feeling and wild colour.

## CHAPTER I

### NANDALAL BOSE

Nandalal Bose was born in December 1882 at Kharagpur. His father Purna Chandra Bose was at first an overseer there but subsequently became the Manager of Darbhanga Estate. In his teens Nandalal could make terra cottas with consummate skill and perhaps with his inherent skill of a folk artist, from brick kilns situated near his house in the village of Rajgunj, Howrah.

He came to Calcutta for education and passed Entrance in 1902 from Khudiram Bose's school named Central Collegiate School. He then entered General Assembly and Metropolitan Colleges successively but failed to pass F.A. examination after two attempts. Then he entered Commercial College of which the Principal was one Mr. Chapman.

By that time Nandalal was married and was getting tired of an educational system for which he was not suited. He started painting early and was trying to fulfil his ambition as an artist.

In 1905 he had the occasion to see the pictures of Abanindranath Tagore. He was profoundly impressed by 'Buddha and Sujata' and 'Bajramukut'.

He then made up his mind to study art under Abanindranath whom he met. He expressed his desire by showing his own drawings. The former was at that time the Vice-Principal of Government Art School, Calcutta, and was rather sceptical about his prospects. He refused to believe that Nandalal had passed Entrance Examination and asked him to produce his certificate which happened to be lying with Mr. Chapman, the Principal of Commercial College.

This was another difficulty for Nandalal. The fact is that he

could not pass F. A. Examination and had been migrating from college to college and did not like the prospect of facing the principal and a barrage of questions. He therefore invented a lie. He told him that his marriage was being settled and the bride's father had been asking for the Entrance certificate. The trick worked. He got the certificate and produced it before Abanindranath who was satisfied with both pictures and the certificate. He was admitted into the School in 1905 and studied up to 1910 when he came out successful. He then continued to work under Abanindranath for three years on a monthly allowance of Rs. 60/-.

On the termination of that period he worked uninterruptedly for several years on the same allowance in Vichitra of Rabindranath Tagore. This prolonged period of work was broken by his migration to his native village Rajgunj where he spent some time for rest.

On his return he began his painting for Bose Research Institute of the late Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose. It would appear that Nandalal succeeded in winning admiration of the Tagores and the then educated society of Bengal.

From personal patronage he soon began to enjoy institutional patronage. He became the Principal of Indian Society of Oriental Arts. The period reached its culmination when he joined Santiniketan in 1914 and became Director of Kalabhavan in 1919. He continued to hold the post for 33 years till 1953, the year of his retirement.

It must be noted that while he worked under Abanindranath Tagore, he used to learn the method of *potuas* of Kalighat for knowing folk art of Bengal of which he had an innate understanding from his boyhood, as was evident from his terra-cotta period. He had the sense of a folk artist and his simplicity, but he blended with that sense a superb classical sophistication.

Writing an article on Abanindranath in 1941 in Bengali monthly 'Prabasi' Nandalal asserted that he had been familiar with Indian tradition and had not the slightest intention of following an unknown method. This would seem to be the

motto of his painting career though he had never hesitated to borrow heavily from other sources.

While at Santiniketan he settled down to develop his talent with all the necessary attention and devotion. He began to draw inspiration from life surrounding him as well as from classical subjects. His style therefore underwent some slow process of transformation.

He touched on the life and beliefs of the people and in doing so he developed his individual style in which he borrowed profusely from various sources in technical aspects only.

Thus he visited Bagh cave in 1921 and Ajanta in early 1920. At this stage, according to the late Romendranath Chakravarty, his pictures were considerably influenced by those of Ajanta. Subsequently he came in touch with Rajput paintings which had had their influence on his pictures. According, however, to Sri Manindrabhusan Gupta, another of his students, he was more influenced by Indian sculpture than by painting.

In 1924 he accompanied Rabindranath Tagore to China and Japan and traces of their influence are discernible in his drawings and paintings. In China he closely studied ancient Chinese paintings. Moreover, he studied Egyptian and Assyrian art, marks of which are noticeable in some of his drawings. According to Gupta, his portrait of Gandhi during his Dandi March, 1930 bears influence of Assyrian art. Finally, according to Chakravarty, his study of Impressionist art in later years left some mark in his landscapes.

In this connection it must be added that Abanindranath Tagore observed that he himself was temperamentally different from Nandalal, who was a master of subjects relating to the life of the common people, whereas the former preferred to lead a luxurious way of life and tended to paint princes and palaces. But Nandalal deals with common people with a very sophisticated manner. The difference of outlook, however, never led to any misunderstanding between the two. On the contrary, they had a deep understanding of each other which was never impaired even after long separation.

Here it must be noted that Nandalal through his sketches unveiled a new horizon in Indian art. It is a new chapter of Indian art noted by very few but it pulsates with new life and vigour. This spirit was imbibed by Romendranath Chakravarty, Manindra Bhusan Gupta and Benode Mukherji and they have made original contributions in their own way. By his dynamism Nandalal has done away with much of the old formalities and has given new impetus. It must, however, be admitted that the spirit has yet to be radiated far and wide. It certainly cannot be accomplished in a day.

Nandalal, it would be evident, learnt that Indian painting was a product of Indian geography or soil, whatever that may be called, just as Impressionism was of French geography and Expressionism of German soil. None can master it from a distance. Indian painting, now called Bengal School of Painting, carries a tradition which is forceful and not static in conception and is capable of adopting from various sources, thereby never losing its individuality and the artist has the absolute freedom of giving expression to his philosophy and ideas.

## CHAPTER II

### ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

It is often contended whether the Bengal School of painting associated with the name of Abanindranath Tagore exists or not. In reply to such a contention it can safely be asserted that the movement is not only a historical fact but a living force too. The fact that so much controversy centres round it and the anxiety on the part of some to prove its moribund character, prove beyond doubt that it is not a negligible force and requires not only a review of the works of Abanindranath Tagore but those of Nandalal Bose.

Abanindranath Tagore, the sponsor of the movement, was according to the late E. B. Havell, the master of an art which was not only Indian but his own. 'Dr. Tagore's æsthetic outlook, he continued, 'is not however narrowed down to any particular school or formula, he can fully appreciate all that is best in the European art, ancient and modern, without sinking his own personality in the bog of internationalism.' And here lies his importance. He was imbued with the history and tradition of his country and appeared at a time when national consciousness was surging through the country. It must be repeated however that his style was his own. He looked at a thing purely from his personal point of view and had no political colour. His Indian-ness was purely spontaneous and an expression of his cultural background. Though Vincent Smith has condemned the 'æsthetic nationalism' of E. B. Havell and Dr. Coomarswamy, yet national and personal outlook cannot surely be obliterated easily.

It is quite beside the point whether Lord Ronaldshay or Aurovindo Ghosh supported his 'race consciousness' though both, with opposite political outlooks, appreciated his national consciousness.

It would appear, however, that Abanindranath Tagore was completely indifferent towards political labels. He was, as is well known to the Bengali reading public, a master story-teller for the juveniles as well as for the adults.

In his famous pictures, we find his love for anecdotes that appeal to the Indian mind. Such, for instance, is the picture 'Kach O Devojani' or 'Buddha and Sujata'. In these pictures he not only gave Indian background but delineated two different epochs of Indian history. In 'Omarkhyam' he goes to the history of Iran, her rich cultural heritage.

Another point which others have pointed out, was his musical temperament. He was so fond of playing stringed instruments that the outbreak of plague in Calcutta could not have stopped his musical ecstacy but for the death of his favourite daughter who fell a victim to the deadly epidemic. There is symphonic suggestiveness visible in indistinctness in pictures which remarkably demonstrate the musical imprint of his mind.

Such was the man who sponsored the movement and it would be interesting to note that he had had his training from an Italian painter who happened to come and die in Calcutta.

Abanindranath used to be a liberal teacher. There is a story relating to his student Nandalal Bose who, in his early days, drew a picture of devoted Uma. It was indeed a picture of austere devotion for winning Siva and Nandalal did not decorate Uma with usual ornaments. When the latter showed the picture to Abanindranath, he advised decoration. Nandalal however left in a sceptical mood but Abanindranath had a second thought over the matter. He could not sleep properly thinking that the picture might be spoiled due to his wrong advice. Uma must not have ornaments as she was practising austerity. So he hurried to Nandalal in the early morning and was relieved to find him hesitating before undertaking the operation.

It is not possible at this stage to assess the impact of the movement on Indian art in general but it must be emphasized that the movement he set on was transformed by Nandalal Bose.



### CHAPTER III

## SKETCHES OF NANDALAL BOSE

Nandalal's sketches have an unusual origin. While copying from the famous sculptures of India, Nandalal was struck by the remarkable movement of lines and all his sketches bear the impress of superb skill in lines. In simple lines he has expressed the greatest of his ideas. Sketches to Nandalal are what songs were to Tagore.

The classical European painters would never have published their sketches because these were sketches only for final drawings. But to Nandalal sketches themselves have their inherent values. Just as there are different periods of development of his paintings, so have his sketches their time of development.

Sketches seem to have started in a period when he began to be aware of the world around him, which could not be delineated in well painted pictures but struck him as remarkable and worth drawing. Here he could express the idea simply through lines. Most of his sketches have been drawn on post-cards. But many have been drawn in small size cards deliberately and done with superb skill and delicacy. Some might have been done carelessly but his mastery over lines is revealed in those careless moments.

It must be recalled that Nandalal has something of the inherent power of Bengal *potua* or folk artist. But he realized the inadequacies of folk art. The simple lines of folk painting have all the shortcomings of folk art in general. And complex ideas require more depth. Hence Nandalal blended his *potua* role with that of a classical painter of India. Never for a moment did he forget the softness and subtlety of a *pot*. As a result his sketches have the impress of flexibility and subtlety



Plate I. The Musicals



Plate II. Decorated Nati



Plate III. Dancing Nati

*Wall Paintings of China Bhaban, Santiniketan*



Plate IV. Preparing for the supreme sacrifice



Plate V. The Finale

*Wall Paintings of China Bhabani, Santiniketan*

of Bengal *pot* as distinguished from the rigour of the classical paintings of India.

But then sketches represent the flashes of his mind. His different stray thoughts find expression in sketches.

To understand his sketches we must examine his paintings as well. It would be sufficient for our purpose to study his wall paintings in the Bose Institute, Calcutta, and China Bhaban, Santiniketan. Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose was a very artistically minded man. His whole research institute bears the impress of a highly refined mind. The hall of the institute has part of it decorated with some of the best paintings of Nandalal Bose. There are altogether four paintings in the ceiling. The first one would be about 20 ft. long and has almost the same width. The other three are about 6 ft long and have smaller width.

The paintings done by a folk artist are simple and decorative and the subject is lotus and leaves. They have been drawn very carefully and are specimens of superb craftsmanship. The colours used are not complex. There are white and pink colours but they are effective and create sober impression. Besides, there is a picture done by Nandalal on the wall in canvas, which would be about four feet long. That is a picture of a man and a woman on a lotus, the woman playing a flute with her eyes on it and the man looking at a distance with anxious eyes. The man has distinct muscles showing his determination and his eyes demonstrate seriousness. The coloration is mild. The brownish tint, the favourite colour of Nandalal, has been used. Truth is believed to be represented with its consort Imagination playing the magic flute.

There are more pictures on the wall of the adjacent building which was probably the reception room of Jagadish Chandra Bose. There are smaller pictures of about 1 sq.ft. covering the four walls of the room. The colour used is typical of Nandalal. It is true to say of Nandalal that his choice of colour shows his attitude towards life. They are always sober and have a deep effect on the mind of onlookers. His coloration consists of white, dark and brownish tints. All the colours used must be his own

making. There are decorative lotuses but they are done with a restrained hand firmly and in clear lines.

There are scenes from Mahabharata, chariots and playing of chess. There are seven pictures in each of the opposite walls and five in the other two. These pictures are obviously from Mahabharata and drawn according to Nandalal's outlook. In the first picture we find elephants. In the second we find a chariot driven by elephants with a seated charioteer and another person on his side. In the third there is playing of chess. There are five human figures in all with different traits and facial features. Of the five, two are consulting together, one playing on the board, another reclining figure is obviously instructing, and the fifth one stands watching.

In the fourth picture there are altogether three human figures, one with both hands and eyes on the board, another with a hand on the cheek, eyes on the board, watching with a smile. The third is looking beyond.

The fifth picture contains eight figures who look at different directions and appear to be sad.

The sixth picture consists of a chariot—the charioteer looking back at the solitary man at his side. A flag is flying on the chariot.

The seventh picture contains two bullocks and two human figures, one dark and the other brown.

On the narrower wall there are five pictures of almost the same size. In the first picture there is a lotus, in the second two female figures in dark and brownish tint, one bowing with folded hands. In the third picture there are seven human figures, one girl looking at the other whose looks are directed towards the front. The fourth picture consists of four human figures of which three are females all looking at the male who looks beyond. The fifth is a picture of lotuses.

On the other longer wall, besides scenes of cremation ground after the battle of Mahabharata, there is a picture of a man on horse, and a girl who looks at a distance and towards the horse sideways. The man looks in front of him. In the centre

there is the picture of a solitary figure with left hand raised and right hand down. In the fifth picture there are four female figures, two looking at each other, the third looking back and another sideways.

It has been noted that coloration of these pictures is extremely sober and simple consisting mainly of white, dark, chocolate and brownish tints. The effect is soothing for the eyes. The colour may appear dull to lovers of strong colour. But we must remember the subject with which he deals. The figures are lively with their expressions in sparkling eyes. All grandeur of colour has been subdued for the purpose of giving the human and other figures their full expression of personality. Struggle on human and animal levels are believed to be represented in these pictures. It may be noted that all the divisions and characteristics ascribed by Romen Chakravarty and Mani Gupta become somewhat blurred due to Nandalal's too much individualistic approach. His approach is not dehumanised as Read describes Modern Art. His approach is more than humanist because he gives individuality to animals and inanimate objects.

Anyway, the pictures on the walls of Bose Institute represent some of his best paintings in superb drawing, his own choice of colour and orientation of the subject matter and finally the expressions and character he ascribed to the figures he has drawn. His China Bhaban pictures have been described later on in this chapter. In analysing his thoughts we find him moving in two spheres. First the art of the modern world and secondly the political history of India. He realized that an Indian artist can grapple with the problem of the modern world with his own tools. He can express all his ideas that pass through his mind through his means of expression. His experiments therefore could not be like those of French artists because a French artist has his own technique developed on his soil and background. In a different geographical situation and tradition, both social and artistic, the mind of the artist must react in different ways and an artist should first of all have freedom of

mind and expression. He should neither be slavish nor imitative nor should he pursue the mirage of fashion. He should have his courage of conviction. So we find a panorama of life in his sketches. Here we find scenes of Gopalpur scabbaches, the pandal of Congress sessions, portraits of Gandhi and Tagore, Santal men and women and even a scene of tramway strike in Calcutta in 1953.

Regarding political views it must be noted that Nandalal is a lover of freedom and not a party politician. Perhaps, he never cared for party politics. But he used to have deep interest in freedom movement of India. He was in contact with many political workers and would have been glad to be of any assistance to them with his pictures.

He, however, keeps deliberate silence when politics is talked about, though he fully realizes that India lost freedom because she lost her freedom of mind. Indian art ceased to be a force when artists ceased to think for themselves. Who conquered India, therefore, was immaterial. It is the cause of the loss that counts. Hence he supported a vigorous freedom movement whoever may have started it and he wanted a free life for the people. Being temperamentally serious, he avoided all the lighter and vulgar aspects of life. He chose from Saivism and Vaishnavism what appealed to his temperament. It is, therefore, seldom that one comes across erotic scenes in Nandalal's pictures. He has drawn a large number of paintings—perhaps some of his best—on Siva and some fine ones on Kirtan scenes of Chaitanya, the Vaishnava preacher of Bengal. In Bengal, Siva and Parvati are popular god and goddess, as well as human beings endowed with human feelings and are treated as such.

Again, Chaitanya initiated a great equalitarian movement amongst the masses of Bengal. From the following quotation from 'History of Bengal' Vol. II by Sir J. N. Sircar, we obtain a general view of Bengal Vaishnavism. It runs : 'During Mughal rule, the entire religious life of Bengal was transformed by Vaishnavism. The basic principle is bhakti or personal devotion to God (as Krishna Vasudeva) with an intensity of

emotion akin to conjugal love. The theory of it had been known long before and in other parts of India too. But Chaitanya (1486-1533) by his teaching made it a reality to the masses of Bengal and Orissa. He however did not found a church and his spiritual influence would have been ended with the last of his personal disciples, after which he would have been dimly remembered as one of the thousands of God-intoxicated sadhus of India. The permanence of Bengal Vaishnavism is due to the organization of a sect—its rules of life, its discipline and its financial basis, by Nityananda and the creation of a special theology by the seven Fathers of the Church (Sapta Goswami). It is they who gave fixity and material to the pure form and light which had emanated from the lips of their master, though the word church, as understood in Christian Europe, is inapplicable to the countless loose groups of local subjects comprehended under the general name of Vaishnavism in Bengal whose sole bond of union is a common spiritual heritage and differentiation from all other sects in the land. But despite their lack of disciplined organization and of control by a hierarchy of priests acting under one common supreme pontiff, the new religion of Chaitanya has made Bengali Hindu society what it is today. It has all but extinguished (except among the lowest classes) the worship of Divine creative energy in its female form (sakti) which used to prevail all over Bengal before the advent of Chaitanya. Sakti worship, better known as the Tantrikism, has declined almost universally in West Bengal and in a less marked degree in East and North Bengal. But Vaishnavism, in the vast spaces of Bengal which it dominates, has introduced two wholesome fruits. We owe to it the present almost total abolition of the ritualistic sacrifice of animals and drinking of wine as a religious duty. Even greater than this moral reformation of the upper and middle classes, has been the work of Vaishnavism in uplifting the lower ranks of society and the illiterate masses by carrying religion to their doors through the device of 'Nam Sankirtan' or chanting procession—which is spoken of as the



unique contribution of Chaitanya to the spiritual life of the modern age' (pp. 220-21).

We can find from this rather long quotation the real background of kirtan in Bengal. Tantrikism, however, has not declined. Durgapuja is a form of Sakti worship and it is not showing any sign of decline. On the contrary, it is marked by growing popularity. Kali worship is also a form of Sakti cult and hence Tantrikism. Ramkrishna and Vivekananda had been worshippers of Kali whose worship and popularity cannot be said to have abated. Marriage of Siva and Durga is a sort of compromise of two systems, Saivism and Sakta cult. Vaishnavism is certainly not without influence, which seems to have expanded to places like Orissa. Here it would be interesting to quote from 'History of Indian philosophy' Vol. V, by Dr. S. N. Das Gupta. Referring to the existence of a Siva statuette at Mahenjodaro he says: 'As a matter of fact, the worship of Siva is found prevalent almost in every part of India and in most of the cities we find the temples either in ruins or as actual places of worship. Siva is worshipped generally in the form of phallic symbol and generally men of every caste and women also may touch this deity and offer worship. The Saiva forms of initiation and the Tantric forms of initiation are to be distinguished from the Vedic forms of initiation which latter is reserved for three higher castes' (p. 8).

Sir Jadunath Sircar with all his profound scholarship could not unfortunately reveal the complex character of Indian philosophical set up, particularly that of Bengal. Perhaps he did not aim at that. Anyway, Vaishnavism somehow got associated with eroticism in Bengal and Saivism with virility. And it would be obvious that Nandalal chose his subjects with deep insight. Kirtan of Chaitanya at Nilachala expresses the spirit of breaking the barriers of rigidity in society. Saivism similarly shows vigorous upsurge of popular strength. These systems were blended in society for its upkeep. Not that drinking was stopped but a moral sense against all sorts

of inhumanity was revived in the society. Vaishnavism became the spearhead of humanism in Bengal against inhuman practices and sacrifices in the society. Hence Vaishnavism was a matter of weakness and ridicule to the Saktas.

Vaishnavism in one sense heralded a spirit of revolt against animal sacrifices in religious ceremonies. Human and goat sacrifices to goddess Kali were common in Bengal. Vaishnavic influence could not succeed in abolishing such sacrifices but left a spirit of humanism behind. This spirit was utilised subsequently by the 19th century humanists of Bengal. Saivism represented worship of phallus and Sakti tantricism, and all these got blended with other popular beliefs and institutions.

It may be remembered that the subject matter of artists, scientists and philosophers is the same, the only difference being in their different manner of handling the subject matter *i.e.* human life.

Nandalal saw the truth behind these popular beliefs and due to his vision in representing them he was transformed from a painter to an artist. He has shown various aspects of Saivic pictures in his own light.

Nandalal's Gandhi with strong muscles showing determination proves that he was not concerned with politics of Gandhi but he appreciated the role Gandhi played in transforming the masses, giving them new self-confidence and pride. That is why his choice of Gandhi's Dandi March is so significant. Nandalal's concern has always been the life of the common people. Left to himself he would always draw a Santal or a boatman or a ploughman. And everywhere we notice his swift-moving subtle work of lines.

In this connection it must be noted that Nandalal is a definite turning point in the world of Indian painting. He is the first painter who takes a historical view of rise and fall of Indian people and art. He attaches great importance to freedom of artists. He had therefore great love for his patron Tagore who assisted in instilling in him a spirit of freedom and succeeded in creating an artistic environment around him at

Santiniketan where Nandalal has spent more than three decades.

So we find in Nandalal's Gandhi firm determination and courage and not Gandhi's hostility to art and culture. Nor was Nandalal interested in fault finding. He gives what is one's due.

Havell remarked that future of India's art would be with her politicians. But India's political future also lies with future of artists. The reason is that artists and writers carry free ideas to the people. Political freedom in the final analysis is nothing but existence of a free society. Hence so long as artists enjoy freedom, political freedom is also sustained. Indian political and philosophical institutions had been based on the work of artists.

Again, restriction on some members would ultimately lead to strangulation of the whole society. It can occasionally be the other way round. Akbar tried to introduce a free atmosphere which was a move from top and not from bottom. As a matter of fact, it is a sort of co-operation. When the artist is convinced of a philosophy, the diffusion of ideas is wide and genuine and when the work is subsidized, the art languishes. Artists carry the message of freshness and vitality and once their voice is silenced, the society becomes stagnant.

The late E. B. Havell has stated that Indian art kept education of the people going throughout the ages. But this too is partially true. Because he failed to notice that Indian education itself became static and Indian art lived as imitative folk art. As a result, a wide gulf yawned between class and mass and, as Tagore put it, education became like a two-storied building without a staircase. While the people repeated the refrains of old songs, educated people in their aloofness remained isolated from the masses.

Art can be understood according to the choice of subject matter and its interpretation according to the exigency of the situation. We watch the process in Nandalal's art development. He never bothered about court scenes. His subjects always touch the people around him in significant points. His

subject-matter at Bose Institute has already been referred to. Santals around him at Santiniketan form an important chapter of his painting. His picture 'Sati', for instance, depicts the poignant life of Indian womanhood. Sufferings of an oppressive system become manifest. People in general may not appreciate his subtle lines and superb sketches but his carefully chosen subjects touching the life of people always have an appeal for them.

Here the difference between Nandalal and Abanindranath Tagore becomes obvious. Though Abanindranath was more literary and subtle in presentation of colour and particularly brilliant in symphonic art, his subject-matter pertains to ideas which bear no connection with people in general. Abanindranath's very signature was an imitation of Persian script in Bengali. He seemed to live in an imaginary Persian world. He, therefore, rightly remarked that Nandalal was essentially a *Potua* and he himself an artist of the princes. Indeed that is true. Nandalal lives in a world of living human beings. Abanindranath was interested in court life and luxurious living but Nandalal in noble living. Nandalal's difference with painters like Picasso is thus manifest. Unlike Picasso he has not excluded landscapes from his paintings. This is no blame on anybody. The difference is one of temperament. In addition to that, Nandalal's vision of history in general and of Indian history in particular, gives him an added significance.

Havell, of course, placed Indian architecture and sculpture above Indian painting. But Nandalal having been inspired by Indian sculpture, painting and folk art, has achieved a new height in Indian painting. Indeed, he has given a new turning to the history of Indian painting.

He has made the rigid rules flexible and has raised Indian painting to the level of Indian sculpture.

He has shown that all ideas and impressions can be expressed through this tradition which is marked by flexibility. All the art movements of the world throughout the history have their own distinctiveness. None can be repeated. Renaissance Ita-

lian painting and modern French painting had had their characteristics which cannot be reproduced. Ajanta painters through several centuries spoke their minds through paintings. So the movement initiated by Nandalal has had its roots in Ajanta tradition but has its own orientation. His art is therefore far from a pale imitation of Ajanta art or of any other age of India. With deep knowledge of Indian painting in general and Bengal painting in particular, he has forged his creative way which would pave the way of future artists aspiring to be creative and artistic. In sketches particularly, his art is shorn of all rigidities and hence plainly understood.

In this connection, it would be proper to describe some of his Santiniketan paintings. All the paintings in walls of different sectional buildings of Santiniketan have been drawn under the direct supervision of Nandalal Bose. Of these one in the wall of China Bhaban has been drawn by him. This is a brilliant series of pictures of which he himself is conscious. These pictures perhaps explain his relation with Rabindranath Tagore. These pictures were drawn in 1941, the year of the death of Rabindranath Tagore. The date is 18th Falgun, 1348 B.S. It has a series of 8 pictures. They have been drawn in his usual pale brown colour mixed with white and dark tints. *Natir Puja* itself is one of the best lyrical dramas by Tagore. Based on a Buddhist story it depicts the self-sacrifice of a girl for Buddhist ideal. On stage it is enlivened with dance and music. As a poem it tells of a tragic though dramatic story. Nandalal has shown with remarkable effect these significant incidents. The most brilliant is the last picture where poetry and drama have been blended through few lines, showing a full moon in the background. With so little of colour he has used the lines to give expression to some of the most poetic lines of Tagore. One is struck by the way he has dealt with the subject in such compact manner.

In the first of the series, the girl is carrying flowers. In the second, he has shown playing of instruments. In the third, the girl is interrupted from worshipping Buddha. The scene of a

happy holy festival is shown in the fourth picture. In the fifth, the girl proceeds with offerings. In the sixth, she is fully decorated for the dance and in the seventh, she dances wildly and in the eighth, she sacrifices herself.

Nandalal has, with his exquisite lines, drawn the lyrical beauty of human figure and in the last picture the movement can be appreciated without the human figure itself.

This, as has been said, is a remarkable picture because it shows how deeply he understood the ideas of Tagore whose rhythmic sense he shared intimately.

But it must be remembered that Nandalal is seldom literary. Nor is he a writer except on the technical aspects of art. Generally he is a silent man. He is ill at ease in public speaking. He expresses himself only through his art.

Indian folk artists had been artisans and illiterate people. But Nandalal with high historical sense is a man of profound culture and his medium of expression is his art including painting and sketches. Folk artists could express their acquired religious beliefs through their art. They had no idea or vision of their own.

Abanindranath Tagore was a prolific writer. As a writer in Bengali he ranks high. Like the Chinese artists he could prove his literary culture. But Nandalal has raised his art to a higher level to express all his sensibilities. His art speaks of his culture. As he says, his paintings are his message. He has diligently translated all his ideas, serious and light, into paintings and sketches. His humour and wit are also similarly ventilated.

In China, painting is a sign of accomplishment of the scholars because their calligraphy is also a sort of painting. Knowledge of literature and painting go hand in hand in China. In India of course it is different. Nandalal however has his own ideas on painting. He thinks that an artist can play with art as freely as a poet does with verse and musicians with their compositions. He created his own colour with *gari mati* and other materials. His original coloration is often misunderstood.

According to him his disposition of colour gives a special character to the painting. By creating the colour himself, the artist expedites the process of his creation. His ideas get precisely expressed. Those who adversely criticize colours of Nandalal, have failed to get into the meaning of his paintings as well. His colours have an unrivalled subtlety which suits the sort of ideas he intends to convey—an exquisite refinement which is his own for its softness and originality.

Softness of his colour comes from two sources, one from *pot* paintings of Bengal and secondly, the general aversion of Indian painters to use strong colour. To cite instances, we find his Siva series of pictures, Karna-Kunti, revealed in subtle mild colours chosen by him. There we find his choice, delicacy and brilliant workmanship. How Nandalal derived his ideas, through insight, from Indian art, can be judged from the following remarks of Dr. Coomarswamy: 'Indian literature of all kinds and at all periods, at any rate after the Mauryas, make incidental references to painting. It may be taken for granted that from a very early period not mere sculptures and architectural details covered with the plaster and coloured, but that the flat walls of temples and palaces were decorated, within and without, with pictures or with painted wreaths and creepers. In the Epics we often hear of painted halls or chambers in palaces. A whole scene of Bhababhuti's "Uttar-Ramcharit", dating from the close of Gupta period, is laid in such gallery where Rama and Sita are represented as viewing newly executed paintings of scenes from their own life which awaken in Sita a longing to revisit the forests, creating in her "latent impression" (bhabana). The Vishnudharmottaram distinguishes the kinds of paintings, appropriate to temples, palaces and private houses and applies the theory to painting. Paintings are there classed as Satya, Vainika, Nagara and Misra which I am inclined to render as true, lyrical, secular and mixed, mainly with reference to their themes. The same text devotes considerable space to the question of foreshortening as applied to the feature and limbs; and lay great stress on adherence to canonical proportion.

The necessity of giving expression to the movement of life (chetana) is emphasized; he understands painting who can represent the dead without life movement, the sleeping possessed of it. Finally, it is said with good reason in as much as both are occupied with the expression of emotion that without knowledge of dancing (nritya sastra) it is hardly possible to understand the true skill of painting. Painting appears in all lists of 14 kalas, the fine arts of accomplishments; portrait painting usually from memory and on wooden panels, is a device constantly employed in classical Sanskrit plays. The Kama Sutra of Vatsayana, a work essentially of Gupta period, mentions the drawing panel, paints and brushes as parts of ordinary furniture of a gentleman's (nagarika) chamber and taken in its context this throws light on the meaning of the term nagar as used to define a kind of painting. It is quite evident that in Gupta period at least, painting was not exclusively an ecclesiastical but also a secular art practised by amateurs as well as by professional members of guilds; it was a social accomplishment, at least among princes and ladies of the court and in the fast set.'

In the above quoted lines, standard literature on Indian painting has been precisely summarised and we obtain a glimpse of the chapter of Indian painting which is probably lost. Still we gain an idea of the character and classification of painting and the status of the artists. It seems there had been a class of artists who were secular and who considered art as a matter of accomplishment as in China.

It can reasonably be assumed that painting was not so considered in all ages and some of the methods have undergone considerable modifications. Nagar, or secular, as translated by Dr. Coomarswamy, was certainly not the best form if not simply an amateurish way.

Dancing may be a pre-requisite for learning painting at a certain stage as dancing covered a wide field in Indian dramatic and literary life. But that it has not been found essential for painting is true.



We find that basic understanding comes from a geographical situation and the history of India.

Nandalal Bose in an article states that he has attempted painting in a style not unknown to him. The point becomes clearer when we find Herbert Read talking of a universal art and searching for an American art.

The fact is, universal art does not mean imposition of French style over everybody. Perhaps Read unconsciously searched for a reflection of a local colour in American painting. An individual artist cannot grow without a geographical background.

Studying his life we find that Nandalal from his childhood had imbibed the spirit of folk art of Bengal and mastered its craftsmanship and later developed it by acquainting himself with Indian classical painting. That being his background, we must also take into consideration his environment at Santiniketan where Tagore with his administrative skill was seeking to retain artistic values in the midst of a rush for technical skill. With all this, he was open to make any experiment with any style of painting in the world. Thus he did not confine his attention to urban life as was done by Impressionists. Historical as well as technical changes have provided artists with new materials and problems. In his own way he tried to solve them. Nandalal, it must be remembered, is an amazing contrast to the restless and peaceless artists of France and Netherlands. His calmness is his strength.

Nandalal's sense of anatomy has been a source of vilification by his critics. Here again we can summarize his views from the article referred to above. He has pointed out that like a Chinese artist, he must paint from the impression of his mind, gathered earlier. In fact, this impression has occasionally followed anatomy and often not. To him, following anatomy minutely is not a material point. As for instance, in Gandhi, he has shown anatomical side rather vividly but that is by the way, for a particular purpose.

## PLACE OF ART IN THE MODERN WORLD

Geography and tradition mainly combine to influence art. But there is also philosophy and science and international relationship. It was the geography of Italy with her blue sky and natural beauty that influenced the growth of Renaissance art in Florence and Venice. Again, the geography of France, with her varied natural beauty, made it possible for Paris to be the radiating centre of Art of Europe in the last one century. Excepting pre-Raphaelitism, a minor art movement which occurred in England,—a non-painting but art-loving nation—almost all the art movements of the last and this century had had their origin in Paris. To begin from 1820, there were Classicism, Romanticism, Independents like Courbet, Impressionism, Post-impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Pointillism, Neo-objectism, Die Neu Sachlichkeit, Free Fantasy, Futurism, German Expressionism, Neo-plasticism etc. It must be borne in mind that all these movements mainly relate to painting though they had had connection with other arts including of course literature. That, however, indicates that painting, being a medium of communication, is more suitable for expression of certain ideas than other media. In a sense, however, painting is more universal than literature. But as has been mentioned earlier, geography gives birth to national art as well as literature or rather art acts as much as a national language. Hence art takes a certain local character. Again it is art which can be universal. But as has been noted earlier, this argument is pushed to drown the voice of art other than modern art. But modern art, according to American authors, is hovering round U.S.A. When World War II came nearer, painters of Europe were quick in their response to the times, with cruelties

of Surrealism, the activism of Social Realism. Then came the Abstraction of late thirties and early forties during World War II. After 1945 Abstract Expressionism, a mixture of Surrealism and Expressionism, was introduced with the arrival of refugees from Europe to U.S.A.

We must remember that painting needs freedom of expression of more enduring ideas of a nation. Hence the artist can often reflect the complex conflict of ideas of an age. The depression of 1930 and World War II had damaged French art very badly as Nazism, Fascism and Communism had done to German, Italian and Russian art. U.S.A. abandoned social realism and took to Abstract art in a horror-struck world.

In the last hundred years, painters along with authors have been facing a new situation. The Industrial Revolution and scientific developments have brought about a new pattern of society which has provided a new status to the artist as a gifted individual and at the same time robbed him of art itself by rendering every transaction commercialised and making artist redundant and helpless. So an artist can either be a commercial artist and a cog in the wheel of party machinery of politics or a quaint man living in his ivory tower. It needs mention that too much is made of this expression—ivory tower. Civilization itself is related to construction of ivory tower and art too is to an extent escape from humdrum of daily life and all great thinking cannot be done in the corner of a market place or stock exchange. But at the same time change in modern architecture must be noted in cities, streets and buildings. And herein lies the conflict of an artist or author. Communists turn them into docile propagandists openly. So did other parties to a great or less degree. In India, the National Congress ignored, if not humiliated, them. Recently, however, some of the state ministers are appreciating the propaganda value of artists and authors and are trying to make good the loss, so far incurred due to their Gandhian anti-artistic outlook.

All these art movements in Europe as mentioned above,

were the outcome of the protests of the artist against being turned into a cog of the wheel or completely getting isolated. The tendency of the artists to render their works obscure and then be interpreted by an army of critics—is a way of asserting their individuality. But the problem, it must be noted, has not been successfully solved. The tendency is, however, not limited to painters alone. Poets and literary men have felt the same sense of isolation. George Bernard Shaw in the late 19th and early 20th century became a philosopher and critic of politics and everything under the sun, in his attempt at self-assertion as a dramatist. Perhaps Shaw hinted at the solution in his own way. But in India, though the impact has been somewhat different yet it is there. Owing to difference of tradition and history, an Indian intellectual has greater opportunity for his work than any other group of people in the society. So the modern industrial world did not react in Tagore and Nandalal in the same way, as for instance, in the case of George Bernard Shaw or D. H. Lawrence, Joyce or T. S. Eliot, Gauguin or Van Gogh. Though Post-impressionism is believed to be the beginning of disintegration of European art, Impressionism itself created Bohemianism and flight from civilization, due to rigidity of 19th century society as in the case of Gauguin.

It has been observed that a poet or a painter becomes mere entertainer or artisan when he lacks vision. So the artist can have place in society when he adopts a comprehensive outlook on society in general. People in general are not hostile to art. They would take more interest when they find artists interesting, though not necessarily useful. Manifest ugliness of modern art and constant researches of Picasso spring from the prevailing instability.

Nandalal has shown his vision and a comprehensive outlook on society. That is why his pictures, ranging from 'Karna-Kunti' and 'Ardhanariswar' to portraits of Tagore and Gandhi, or a sketch of tramway strike—demonstrate his outlook and vision, comprehensive of all elements of society. He is not inspired with the same ideals as those of Ajanta Buddhists or

Ellora Saivaites. His outlook is his own. He has dealt with the same subjects with some of the old techniques but his outlook makes them different and distinct. With his subjects his style has evolved. In addition to that we must take into account the fact mentioned earlier that Tagore, while founding a university for art and culture, went deep into the history of India and retained the value under the changed circumstances. That has saved Nandalal from a restless search for his root as in the case of French artists. Nandalal has of course a mental detachment which saves him from restlessness.

As he has commented 'my pictures are my message', we find it there. His message is one of mild colour and deep emotion and not exhibitionism. He therefore needs no manifesto nor any cheap stunt like ever busy folk artists of fashion.

His silence may encourage the idle tongue to vilify him and the ideas he represents but that had not distracted his attention from his work. Diffusion of ideas and facts about him would dispel the ignorance surrounding him. What is important is that he has successfully adapted the fundamentals of Indian art to his objective thereby proving that so-called Bengal School of painting is not a moribund dogma but a vigorous art movement.

## CHAPTER V

### NANDALAL IN INDIAN ART

It is necessary to state that Nandalal is not a sudden phenomenon in the history of Indian art. He owes a debt not only to Abanindranath Tagore in particular but to the history of Indian art in general. And it goes to the credit of Nandalal that he has taken full advantage of his environment and history. Speaking of geography of India, isolation of the Indian peninsula as well as the climate, mountains, rivers and seas have their respective influences in the history of Indian art.

Indian art in general has grown out of the blending of concepts of Dravidian, Aryan, Negrito and Mongoloid races.

Indian art had had its origin in perhaps Mohenjo-daro civilization. 'We are far from understanding at present', to quote H. Zimmer, 'the rich vocabulary of symbols on the seals of Mohenjo-daro; nevertheless the more we comprehend them the more it becomes apparent that the religious civilization of the Indus in the 3rd millennium B.C. was the source of many of the traditions prevalent in central and southern India today. The Indus civilization reveals fundamental elements and striking details that were completely foreign to the religious and literary traditions of the Aryans but which reappeared in Indian art and religion (first among the folk, then among the governing classes) when the Aryan domination of northern India began to wane during the 2nd half of the 1st millennium B.C. Their return to the surface can be studied in the early Buddhist monuments of Barhut and Sanchi.' (The Art of Indian Asia, p. 25.)

Subsequently, from the Epic period of 1500-660 B.C., Indian philosophical speculation and religious thinking are recorded and art is closely related to them. Indian art is thus distinct

from Greek art and is therefore partly incomprehensible to the foreigners. To them Indian art suggests rather than states something.

In India art is devoted to the education of the people in religious truth. As a result secular art, as conceived these days, did not exist in India. But that is also partly true. According to one writer 'Indian art is life as interpreted by religious philosophy.' So it would be obvious to any discerning student of Indian art, that the artist was an indispensable member of the society. His vocation therefore was determined by birth. Indian art ran parallel to life. Indian art accordingly used to be determined by the attitude of the artists towards their subjects. Though attitude differed, poses, gestures etc. were directed by the sastras.

The history of Indian painting dates back to the early frescoes mentioned in the old Pali literature and Cittagarh of Kosala king Pasendi. In the 1st or 2nd century B.C., schools of painting existed and remains are still to be found in Ramgarh, Orissa. In the excavated Vihara of Ajanta, paintings are available of 1st to 7th century A.D. Paintings of Bagh in Malwa date back to the 6th century A.D. The Art of Ajanta would be discussed later.

By the 7th century A.D. art had declined throughout the Northern India with the disappearance of Buddhism and its traditions, and only in Bengal do we find the relics of Buddhism in the form of Vajrajana or as the concept of Sakti or female energy of Bodhisatwa. It is this aspect of Buddhism that we find in Tibet and Nepal in the 8th and 9th centuries. In Bengal Buddhism gets mixed with Saivism and Vaishnavism through a process of complex assimilation. At that time the great university city of Nalanda was a seat of radiation of culture and art. Clear indications are available of the relation between Indonesia and Indian Buddhism of Nalanda in 860 A.D.

A great religious establishment of Pala period has been disinterred from the ruins of Paharpur in Bengal and shows

close affinity with Java in designs of temples etc., and bronze sculptures. This phase continues up to the invasion of Muslims and the subsequent conquest by the 12th century A.D.

The period between 650 and 1550 A.D., however, was dark because of absence of record for some time but subsequently new caves and sources have been discovered. Rajput paintings and those of Punjab and Himalayas as well as book covers of Manuscripts unearthed in Orissa are available from 16th century onwards. Paintings of covers, illustrated in Nepalese Manuscripts and wall paintings at Polonaarma in Ceylon were found of 12th century A.D.

Rajput and Pahari paintings of hill states of Kangra, Chamba and Punch continue up to the 19th century with universal aspects of life as their content and are distinct from the Mughal art of portraits and royal and court patronages.

Strangely, art in India in its declining period existed in Bengal and regained its life in Bengal in early 20th century. Nandalal was inspired by Abanindranath Tagore, his master, who was inspired by ancient and Mughal art. About his relation with Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal remarked, during 1954 exhibition of his own paintings at Government College of Art, Calcutta, that he had been visiting the exhibition of a disciple of Abanindranath Tagore.

The Bengal School of painting may have started with pictures of mythical subjects but in course of time have come down to daily life. Nandalal himself admits that he started with pictures of gods and goddesses but has subsequently painted human beings of surrounding life. Dr. Coomarswamy saw lack of conviction in portrayal of mythical subjects and influence of Japanese painting but did not fail to admire their unswerving love rather than self-advertisement as the source of inspiration. But Dr. Coomarswamy spoke of a passing phase. In Nandalal we find continuation of an effort for quarter of a century and development of his art. In the vast collection of his paintings we find variety and his attitude towards life.



It must be made clear that an artist, consciously or unconsciously, is inspired by a philosophy. In Renaissance Italy, there was a changed attitude towards man. Indian art is always occupied with human beings. Divinity of a human body was conveyed to China from Indian art through Buddhism. But that humanism has been transformed through centuries due to inventions of science and artistic quest for truth. Nandalal too was conscious of the human society around him and that interest found expression through his drawings of Santal life.

Abanindranath Tagore painted mythical subjects not with traditional Indian religious spirit. He laid stress on his individual point of view and the story aspect of the subject matter. So Dr. Coomarswamy was free to speak of 'lack of conviction'. He indeed was not a Buddhist painter to educate people on Buddhism and nobility of Buddha. He saw Buddha from a human point.

But Nandalal painted human beings with his knowledge of men. The late E. B. Havell appreciated his 'strong decorative sense' in the 'Trial of the Princes' and delineation of 'tragedy of Indian womanhood' in 'Sati'. But he failed to see the development of Nandalal who was decorative by the way. He has strong interest in the subject matter and particularly in human society around him. Havell however made a significant remark when he said: 'No art that is only one man deep is worth much. It should be thousand men deep. Which-ever school of pictorial art most accurately interprets the mind of modern India, it is politicians rather than artists or art teachers who control the future of Indian art!'

It is here that we find the cause of neglect of Nandalal Bose and his school of painting. By his silent teaching he is making the movement 'thousand men deep'. At least by his thousand sketches and pictures he has succeeded in reaching art lovers. Some politicians might be interested in party propaganda and are completely incompetent to appreciate the importance of art in general and Indian art in particular.

Fortunately E. B. Havell did not live to see the degeneration of art and artists in the hand of politicians but his point is certainly understandable.

His point was that ruling authorities should understand and co-operate with artists and help art to reach people and to educate people to understand art but never to make art a handmaid of the state. It must be added that in the modern world a really democratic politician needs to be more trained than even his earlier counterpart in the 19th century. He must be a philosopher so to say and must have a cultivated mind with deep understanding of art. Gone are the days, let us hope, when ignorant people could capture power by brute force and enforce their authority in a relentless manner. At least in a civilized community it must not be allowed, provided that members of the community are allowed free access to science, philosophy and art.

In the earlier days, not only in India but all over the world, art in general used to be dominated by religion. If India had too many religions and philosophies, art cannot but be influenced by them. Men under similar circumstances react almost identically. Art had been a source of spreading ideas in all ages. Indian art and painting being the universal language of Indian culture had a wider appeal. Now the situation is considerably changed. Formerly artists used to be inspired by some philosophy or attitude suitable to them and now they must be enthused by a different attitude.

And what that ideal is, is difficult to express in so many words but it can be discerned from the works of Rabindranath Tagore and paintings of Nandalal. They place dignity of human personality above everything else but not ignoring life in general. It is hard to express the philosophy in cut-and-dried definition because respect for human personality too can be expressed through different methods. But one point is certain, the point being absence of formal religion in its full technical sense. Indian painting drew the pictures of contemporary life but that tradition died and Nandalal has

sought to revive the tradition in his own way. In doing so he has shown his profound insight.

In his mythical pictures we notice that religion can no longer be institutionalised. Dogmatic approach must be replaced by human sympathy. That is what we find in Saiva series of pictures or Mahabharata and Ramayana pictures. He has not preached anything but has shown another aspect of Indian art.

It is the function of artists to find out truth from subterranean regions of life and history. Nandalal has performed the task with least publicity and fanfare.

His picture 'Trial of Princes' seems to be a trial of the disciples of Abanindranath Tagore. Nandalal has come out successful and indeed he is the triumph of Tagore too. He represents the whole movement and he has given an orientation to it.

## II

Indian art like art all over the world is connected with religion. But it has its peculiarities just as Russian art, though religious, has its own characteristics. Indian art, however, is closely connected with Indian born religious and philosophical systems such as Buddhism, Saivism, Jainism etc. Reference to paintings are to be found in Ramayana and dramas of Kalidasa.

Mahavamsa, the Ceylonese chronicle written about 5th century A.D., refers to mural paintings of Ruwanweli degaba, built by king Duttagammi in 150 B.C. Pali Buddhist literatures contain evidence of paintings in the pleasure houses of Magadha and Kosala kings. They were probably like the paintings of Orissa and Ajanta.

Chinese travellers of 5th century onwards as well as Taranath, the Tibetan historian of Buddhism in the 7th century A.D., had mentioned the existence of pictures of gods and their superb beauty.

The Jogimara cave of Ramgarh Hills to the south of Mirzapur district contains the earliest relics of Indian paintings. The subjects still preserved show (1) seated male figures with dancing girls and musicians (2) several male figures with wheels in their hands, (3) trees and flowers in two halves with nude human figures and a house in two parts.

The style is identical to that of Sanchi and Barhut. They belong to 2nd century B.C. and are probably inspired by Jainism.

The paintings of Ajanta date from 50 A.D. to about 7th century A.D. There are 29 caves, cut from a rock about 250 ft. high and semi-circular in shape with a stream outside the rock. It is half a mile off from Paharpur in Bombay state.

The paintings belong to different periods, the oldest being caves IX and X, which resemble Sanchi sculptures. These paintings seem to have been supported by Andhra kings, though they were not Buddhists. Most of these paintings must have been done between 550 to 642 A.D. under Chalukya kings and Vakataka kings of Berar.

With the murder of Pulakesin II, a Saivite, by Pallava kings of South, an end was put to the paintings of Buddhist faith in Ajanta. The paintings of Bagh in Malwa belong to 6th century A.D. and have close resemblance to Ajanta frescoes.

The Ajanta frescoes are mainly Buddhistic, consisting of figures of Buddha symbols and sacred objects and Jataka stories. The achievement of painters lies in decorative design with consummate skill and devoted to tell the secret stories of Buddhism evoking deep emotion and respect. Lawrence Binyon writes about Ajanta paintings: 'The art of Ajanta is characterized by the strong outline which marks the early Asiatic style; the colouring appears to have been heavy and hot; the figures and faces are animated. We feel that the painters were possessed by their subject; they worked with fervour and devotion . . . with all the feeling for life in individual figures that the painters show, they betray as little of that instinct by

which an art develops—the instinct towards unity, towards the conception of a subject as a synthetic whole’.

It is relevant in this connection to note that Nandalal has this inherent instinct for paintings as well as the awareness of pains and sufferings of the present age. His conception of man in general and modern India in particular, leads him to choose his subjects.

Anyway, Ajanta paintings belong to several periods and several schools of painters as the subject matter and styles differ.

The Bagh paintings, identical with those of Ajanta, are of equal importance and were found in excavation near Bagh, a village in former Gwalior state, near the road linking Gujrat and Malwa.

The main group of caves contains 8 excavations and the biggest one is 948 sq. ft. They combine variety and merit and do not belong to one period of history. With decorative quality and numerous designs, life has been represented as gay. Two of the Bagh groups show a kind of musical performance, *Hallsika*, acted by women and led by a male. The performers are well-dressed, singing and playing drums, cymbals and other instruments. The paintings are believed to belong to the Gupta period from the style of dressing etc.

Dr. Coomarswamy divided Indian miniature painting into two classes—Rajput painting and Mughal painting—one related to classic art of Ajanta, the other to Persian influence and Mughal court which was neither religious nor popular. But miniature painting existed before Mughal court and they were mainly illustrations of Jain palm-leaf mss., and are sometimes called Jain. But such paintings have been found occasionally to be secular as in mss. of *Basanta Bilasa*, composed during the reign of Ahmed Shah Kutub-Uddin of Gujrat in 1145 A.D. Though figure drawing is weak, yet costumes were drawn faithfully and in detail. They have been found in the book ‘*Kalpa-Sutra*’ and belong to 15th century A.D. and are sometimes called Gujrat painting.

Babar came to India in 1525 and died five years later. In

1536 his son Humayun was without an empire and had his court in Kabul where Sayyid Ali was commissioned to illustrate 12 volumes of hundred folios each of Dastan-i-Amir Hamzah. Ali continued to stay in Akbar's court after the death of Humayun. Due to his influence, style of Mughal painting was mostly romantic, though modified under Indian conditions. Portraiture was developed and Indian flowers and foliages added.

Akbar built Fatehpur Sikri in 1569 and engaged painters to decorate the walls. Some were purely Persian and others of Indian style. Akbar was a great patron of learning and art. Imperial libraries were formed in Delhi and Agra and original mss. with illustrations preserved. There were artists in his court of various schools both Hindu and Muslim. From stories circulated it appears it was not difficult for an artist of merit to receive royal favour. Originals and Persian translations were to be found in the Imperial libraries. Persian translations of Mahabharata are believed to have cost £40,000. Akbarnama is said to contain 117 large paintings. These libraries were preserved by successors of Akbar such as Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb upto 1707. Descendants of Aurangzeb, though having short periods of reign, did not neglect paintings and books but the violent political upheaval and uncertainties following their rules, completely dislocated the libraries and they were to be found scattered throughout the world. The 18th century saw these collections being taken away by adventurers of various nations. In the 19th century, they were neglected and could be had at nominal prices. Interest was, however, revived by the vigorous efforts of the late E. B. Havell.

Regarding Indo-Persian art, as noted by Vincent Smith, the character of Persian Timurid art began to change into sentimentalism of Safavid in the 16th century. During 17th century, refined Safavid style was introduced to India and modifications were made according to Hindu tradition.

Indians were reputed for soft colour and sober tone and unlike Persian, portraiture with individual characteristics was developed. These works were available from the dawn of the

17th century to the beginning of the 19th century. During the rule of Akbar and a portion of Jahangir's reign portraits were all flat absolutely but due to subsequent influence of European art, flat style was considerably modified by Indian artists. Rajput School of painting dates back to 15th and 16th centuries and had always different subject matter; though occasionally influenced by the Mughal school it was nevertheless popular and spiritual in character. It might have been inspired by Persian paintings. Small Rajput courts used to support these painters.

In the 19th century, Raja Ravi Verma of Travancore was the typical and most influential of Europeanised artists. Though he drew pictures of Hindu legends, he did not succeed in touching the soul of India.

That was achieved by Abanindranath Tagore with the active assistance of E. B. Havell. It is believed that Indian art could not live without the background of Indian tradition and colour. That tradition had not been the formalities and technicalities but the spirit behind art. Success of Nandalal lies in his taking up the spirit and getting down to the life of contemporary India and thought of India. He imbibed the spirit of Indian painting in its colour and flat work. Abanindranath Tagore had to encounter all the troubles faced commonly by pioneers of a movement. He however paved the way for the rise of Nandalal, who realized that Indian art, as of old, must adopt a new attitude to life and he gave a new impetus and vision to Indian painting.

### III

Now, the late E. B. Havell, who took so much pains for the rebirth of Indian art and held such high hopes about Indian art, looked to Indian politicians for the growth of art rather than to the artists. Dr. Coomarswamy also hoped for more connoisseurs than at present existing.

If we care to look at the history of India, we shall realize the significance of the remark of much misunderstood Havell. In the history of India written by him called 'Aryan Rule in India', he, of course, has pointed out that real India lived beyond the political vicissitudes. The cultural life, according to Havell, moved on according to its own way, though it suffered setbacks here and there. But it seems Havell was not satisfied with his own explanation. As an acute historian he could not but notice that due to vicissitudes in political life it was difficult to obtain definite traces of Indian painting from 650 A.D. to 1500 A.D. Traces can, however, be had in Nepal, Tibet and Cambodia.

Sculptures and paintings of Pala dynasty have been found but paintings have mainly been destroyed or taken out. Similar fate overtook even the Mughal paintings in 18th and 19th centuries. They were robbed and distributed among foreign merchants at nominal prices and the new owners cared very little for their possessions.

Hence India needed some political safeguards for protection of valuable art. How and what is to be done is a matter of detail. But Indian painting which bears the impress of Indian history deserves political consideration. In absence of that, greater perils await the surviving remnants of Indian art.

Politics has profound influence on art in general. It is immaterial whether the state patronizes directly or not, but its attitude must be definite. In the 20th century we notice the condition of art as different from country to country. In Soviet Russia, for example, an artist holding diverging views from the state authorities forfeits his right of existence. Even a dead author may obtain state patronage according to his political views. The situation is not much different in U.S.A., where communists are hounded out. Fate of artists and authors had been worse in Fascist countries before World War II.

And from history of India we can learn that with political control or from lack of it, art can languish. But in these days, when education is made to be popular, politicians are supposed



to be enlightened enough to promote development of art without undue influence.

To be precise, art may not receive direct patronage from the state but interference and instability of the state can hinder the growth of art and destruction of older ones.

Again, a negative attitude on the part of the rulers may retard the growth of art.

At the beginning of the century the late E. B. Havell wanted more appreciative attitude on the part of the state. Such an attitude can promote a genuine Indian art rather than the drifting towards vain imitation of French art.

#### IV

If we probe into the history of India in relation to Indian art, as detailed by Dr. Coomarswamy, we notice that after the death of Buddha the next great event is the invasion of India by Alexander of Macedon in 327 B.C. It was followed by the rule of Chandragupta Maurya at Pataliputra in the years 321-297 B.C. The next landmark is the reign of his grandson Asoka between 272-235 B.C. Following Asoka were princes of Greek descent who conquered Afghanistan and western part of the Indus. Sakas and Kusanas then displaced them and were in power up to 300 A.D. Kaniska's capital was in Peshawar and he promoted development of Mahayana Buddhism.

Then we find the reign of Gupta dynasty (320-480 A.D.) which ruled from Pataliputra and during this reign so-called white Huns came and settled down in India and were Indianised. Guptas were Vaishnavas and patronised Buddhism.

Harsavardhana (606-648 A.D.) succeeded the Guptas. He supported Saivites and Buddhists. The period between 5th and 7th centuries is considered to be a great age of Indian culture. Its influence transcended the frontiers of India.

After Guptas and Harsavardhana, power shifted to Bengal and Pala dynasty was established which became the strongest

power in Northern India. But undivided rule of sovereigns of central India received a setback and several Rajput kingdoms arose. In the Deccan there were Chalukyas, Hoysalas etc. Further south there were Cholas, Cheras and Pundras.

In Bengal there were florescences of Pala art which extended its influence beyond Indian frontiers to Nepal, Tibet etc.

The Muslim rule in India can be divided into destructive and constructive phases. Between 1000 to 1506 A.D., it was destructive. Hindu painting and sculpture had to take shelter in Tibet, Nepal and other places and most of the temples and structures of North India were destroyed.

The second phase of constructive age began with Mughal Empire and lasted between 1506 and 1757 A.D., followed by British rule. Barring Travancore and Nepal, Muslims expanded in India to most of the territories at some time or other. Vijaynagar retained its independence upto 1565. With the decline of Mughals, rose Merhattas in the 18th century. Indian painting, as has been stated earlier, received another setback with the advent of British rule in the 18th and early 19th centuries when libraries were destroyed and scattered.

It therefore goes to show that India, after two political upheavals, needed certain re-orientation of political life, which could prevent art becoming the easy prey of invaders. This of course happened in China also but under different conditions. The problem therefore remains in a bigger form.

This problem can, however, be solved by a new outlook on society in general and politics in particular. It is merely an accident that Ajanta and other caves escaped depredations of the invaders. The social outlook of the artists to remain passive spectators in times of political changes requires to be changed. That does not mean that they should be attached to some political parties.

The artists must be aware of the forces working in the society in which they live. This awareness would make the society aware of their existence too. Their guidance would then be valued.

Indian art has flourished under the influence of various philosophies at different epochs of its history. But after a time it was found that invaders from outside could easily dislocate the life of the people and consequently prevent the normal flow of life. So a new adjustment of values of our civilization became necessary. Perhaps Akbar during Mughal days realized it but his efforts appeared to be short-lived. He could not touch the root of social life of India except at the top at Delhi.

While discussing the art problem of 20th century Andre Malraux has commented that early art from China to Europe had a family likeness but Leonardo Da Vinci brought the human element and attacked 'two dimensional painting; and significantly enough also designed machines'. Hopes of man and progress were raised by 19th century writers and artists but they were dashed by the war and its consequent fears. And the savage returned in another form and only cinema retains anecdotal art in U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.

Malraux has not gone to the reason of the failure. Probably philosophical questions are involved in the deep-rooted problem.

And that is why the present century political and social systems deserve careful scrutiny. From a cursory glance it would be obvious that in India there had been a breakdown of political life and it could not move further. Since the existing system was inadequate, the easy course of imitation and blind faith is recommended. But such efforts worsen the situation. Philosophers and artists are therefore required to concentrate on these questions. When these are solved, artists will find a new vista which can inspire the whole society to protect itself and its treasures. Unless such courses are adopted Indian art is bound to founder on the rock of politics. Theoretical changes in Picasso's art explain such needs as did the earlier experiments of past improvements and this is true even of Fauves.

In his historical and critical writings, E. B. Havell seemed to have been aware of this problem but could not visualise any solution. Nor was it possible.

But what amazed him was the attitude of artists of India and he was hopeful that by developing an individual outlook composing a universal subject matter, artists might infuse a new spirit in the Indian society and thus carry on the tradition of education. That is why he was disgusted by the unimaginative imitation of art. He writes: 'Gradually the Indian consciousness asserting itself more strongly, evolved its own artistic ideals—ideals as different from the original foreign types as Gothic art differs from Roman and thus created that Indian art which gave its inspiration to the æsthetic thought of all Asia.' He then comes to the main question: 'After many centuries, when the spiritual fervour which had created the classic art of Ajanta, Ellora and Borobudur ran riot in a maze of elaborate ritual in which religious symbolism usurped the function of the artist's creative mind, Indian imagination began to spend its vital force in a repetition of æsthetic formulæ to which all the virtues of the Brahman's mantras were attached. Yet even in this jungle of this exuberant ritualism a great tradition maintained itself and much noble art towered over the tangled undergrowth which reformers like Sankaracharya tried to cut away.'

Then he passed on to the Islamic period of India and showed how Hindu genius in the service of Islam had created a noble architecture and under Akbar a new secular school of painting grew. Though it lacked high spiritual purpose of religious art, 'it had perfect sincerity and high technical distinction—qualities which are conspicuously wanting in the degenerate Anglicised art of the present day.'

He pointed out further that Hindu painters had worked in the limited sphere of Mughal court and were always aware of the fact that art had a noble purpose which was 'to penetrate the soul of things as into close relation with natural verities.'

It must, however, be remembered that he was not an admirer of art for self-indulgence or for vanity which he attributed to the camp of Decadence, which according to him is miscalled as Renaissance of Europe. It must be pointed out that philosophy

of supremacy of man during Renaissance is different from machine designing of da Vinci. As a matter of fact, in India class art and mass art were always separate, class being known as *marga* and mass art as *deshi* or degenerate. The sign of a *deshi* art was its lack of a philosophy and its mere entertainment value. It must be further noted that the philosophy of an artist arises out of his depth of vision and realization of deeper realities of life, or as Havell has put it, 'to penetrate the soul of things'. An artist is generally no philosopher but can see life in his own way and he is great to the extent he succeeds in achieving that insight.

It has been asserted by a writer, while analysing the contribution of the Romans in the development of painting, that they introduced space and optical illusionism as distinguished from Frontality in painting. That goes to show that technique of painting developed through ages with development of technology. But that is one side of the picture because two-dimensional painting can also develop itself according to the sensibilities and outlook of the artist. Nandalal can be quoted as an instance in this respect.

## V

When one looks at the exhibition held in Calcutta between 29th March to 15th April, 1954, one tends to wonder how the sketches of Nandalal would be preserved for the posterity, as in these sketches numbering about 800 Nandalal has shown his vision and profundity. Here pictures are drawn easily by pen and pencil, of whatever had been within his reach, with the least of complexity and in few lines and an age has been represented. Here we can repeat our reference to one sketch 'Tramway Strike 20-7-53', the subject being a distracted gentleman with two children. When the turmoil of the present century would die down, one can contemplate the good humour of the sketch and mockery of city life viewed by the artist in the form

of a harassed gentleman of 20th century Bengal, apparently coming from the middle class.

Here the question of Bengal School and the hairsplitting aspersion made by so-called critics would prove useless. It would appear that Nandalal is representing a tradition which has grown over centuries and is still growing under his guidance.

Dr. Coomarswamy remarked 'that our Pre-Raphaelites have imitated ancient styles rather than reiterated ancient meanings' (Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. III, p. 510). He specifically criticized Bharat Mata which could satisfy politicians and was not art in Indian sense of the term. Probably he was right but he either did not care to study the history of pre-Raphaelites or was biased against any new art in India. Indian painting is, as has been pointed out, two-dimensional like all other ancient art and its advantage lies in its being less life-like. Da Vinci may have introduced technical innovations but art is not sensation mongering. The resultant benefit of technical innovations may be introduced to art in its original two-dimensional form. That is exactly what we find in Nandalal. Indian art is a growth of centuries and Indian art grew out of peculiar condition of India. The ideas prevalent among Indian artists were mostly similar to those of literature except perhaps such difference insisted on in Vishnudharmottaram for learning dancing by painter. But ideal of beauty remains the same. The description of a girl or a man in an Indian poem is the same as that in a painting or sculpture. It appears there was not much difference in the concept of sculpture and painting in India because depredations of nature occasionally forced the artist to create sculpture for permanence rather than paint on paper, cloth or even on wall.

In late years, study of literature was a stimulating factor for Abanindranath Tagore but not for Nandalal for whom study of life was a greater stimulant. In spite of this difference of outlook Nandalal never misunderstood Abanindranath whose purpose was to make Indian art creative rather than imitative. There is no denying that 'modern artists' of Parisian style or

Bengal folk style are descendants of Raja Ravi Verma. That is why in spite of a different outlook Nandalal was prompted to remark during his visit to his own exhibition, that he had been moved by a desire to see the creation of a disciple of Abanindranath Tagore.

It is the close study of Indian art that gave Nandalal the requisite mental equipment to form his comprehensive outlook. All the works of Nandalal show a panorama of Indian history and legend but through his eyes. He is slavish to no system except to truth, which he discovered for himself. That is true of a philosopher or a scientist in his respective sphere. That is why his contact with other arts and life enriched his art. As Tagore pointed out, Nandalal became creative by having been enriched by the heritage of Indian painting. There lies his importance too.

Unlike Chinese painters, Bengal folk painters had no respectable position in society as enjoyed by men of letters. Absence of literacy is not a factor. It was the degeneration caused by social stagnation and political subjugation. The matter has been discussed elsewhere. But it is worth remembering that tradition of serious painting and its appreciation had gone long ago. Ajanta had to be re-discovered. That is indeed not physical discovery but a spiritual discovery too. Painting in general and Ajanta in particular became isolated from the people. The political uncertainty is a symptom rather than the main disease. Painting ceased to be a part of life except as the luxury of the court. Taste naturally degenerated. So Nandalal had to contend against apathy and ignorance more of the literate than of illiterates who do not count.

Apart from his own creation he has tried to create a group of artists whose efforts still remain limited to a few, due to general apathy. As an artist he himself never cared for publicity other than his own creation. Hence to multitudes he is a name only.

In fact, he is never eager for publicity. His approach is different. His art is devoted to serenity and calm beauty of life,

sparkling occasionally with humour. He is least inclined towards any other media. His world is his own. His 'Ardhanariswar', 'Pasture and Cow', 'Jatugriha', 'Trial of Princes', Mahabharata pictures on wooden panels in Sir J. C. Bose's drawing room, Ramayana pictures in the volume edited by the late Ramnanda Chatterji, pictures on Kumarsambhaba, bear the impress of his outlook and personality—one of cool sobriety.

In life Nandalal intended to study medicine but his predilection was for art, which triumphed. It has been narrated earlier how he was admitted to Calcutta Government School of Arts and completed his course.

When we analyse his life and art, we find the striking difference between Nandalal Bose the artist and European artists of twentieth century. The difference lies in the fact that Nandalal is a man devoted to understanding life and history. Unlike Leonardo he is not a designer of machines. He designed the stage for plays of Tagore, the walls of the University of Viswabharati and the scientists' laboratory. He planned the pandals of Indian National Congress. He saw the life of Santals as well as the modern men of India and he exploited two-dimensional picture for all these purposes.

With this attitude he has drawn his numerous sketches in which we find portrayals of present day life. Havell has remarked of Ajanta that fragments of those wonderful frescoes still remaining on the walls, were not only masterpieces of painting but both in vivid imagination and their realized portrayal of contemporary life, they gave a striking impression of creative impulses which were then stirring the mind of India. So can it be said of Nandalal's sketches, which have brought art to daily life.

Havell has further remarked that psychology of Indian history could never be understood by treating Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism as watertight compartments wholly independent of each other and that the sculptors and painters of the Gupta age had left to posterity a record synthesis of Indian thought corresponding exactly to that of the Gupta



recension of Mahabharata in which Krishna, as the incarnation of Vishnu, summed up the essence of Aryan religion in the song of blessed one.

Without agreeing with Havell, it can be said that the spirit of synthesis or what can be called an attitude of artistic detachment towards religious dogmatism, was contributed by artists of Gupta age.

Similarly, Nandalal adopted an attitude of detachment towards events of modern India as Tagore did in his literature but the difference lies in approach. Tagore closely followed the values created by Sanskrit authors in his own light. Nandalal did it in different ways in painting.

In his drawings and sketches we find repeated occurrence of Gandhi, the man. We find him realizing the danger of Indian history when we look at the sketches. Here he valued content more than form. He was constantly aware of poverty and miseries of life in India.

That is a reason why his sketches become more important than paintings despite their superb delicacy. In his sketches we perceive his vision and in his paintings his power. And Nandalal is great for his vision.

It may be noted that Andre Malraux in his 'Psychology of Art' has referred to shortcomings of modern art where negative values were coming to the fore and spirit of questioning had become painfully prominent. He has, however, wanted 'metamorphosis' without the assistance of Asia.

Anyway, civilization must not be judged from a sectarian and regional point of view. But Nandalal has definitely shown a certain amount of sobriety which deserves the attention of serious-minded modern artists. Nandalal has studied modern problems with the accumulated experience of an Indian artist. He has never drawn monsters nor invoked irrationalism. Hence his contribution is not at least negative.

He cared little for effect. He completely rejected French and modern method as unsuitable for his thought and expression. He achieved his balance without being ethereal.

He therefore could draw sketches in profusion. There was no limit to the choice of his subjects. Anything that has touched his artistic soul has poured forth in torrents of sketches.

Art to Nandalal is a serious matter. As in art he shuns all sorts of sensationalism, so his life is apparently uneventful and not restless like some modern artists. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the influence of his personality on art.

By shunning sensationalism and cheap publicity, he had achieved an equipoise of mind which made his art sober in tone and colour.

As Rabindranath Tagore pointed out, Nandalal is apt to forgive even his opponents when they dared to calumniate him and he is never diffident of praising others even in his own line. That again shows, to quote Tagore, Nandalal's mental opulence.

In fact Nandalal was sought to be ignored by many because of his silent devotion to art and his repugnance to sensationalism. He has never accepted the theory that the present age is one of sheer self-aggrandisement. In all ages there are people who are so inclined and not so inclined. And Nandalal is one of the latter who believe that lasting values percolate into human minds slowly. It is meaningless to lose sense of proportion in this respect.

It is remarkable that he was attracted to Government School of Arts by Abanindranath Tagore who had been the Vice-principal there. It was a cool but daring decision on the part of Nandalal to give up other studies and take to art solely at a time when the career of an artist was bleak. From that time he was attached to his master and there was neither friction nor any rebellion on his part, in spite of the difference of outlook.

## CHAPTER VI

### INDIAN IDEAL

There is difference of views about the ideal of Indian art. E. B. Havell thought that what distinguished Indian art from others was its ideal, conception of beauty and forms. He made a detailed discussion on the point and gave some commonsense interpretation of legends of India. The churning of nectar became to him efforts to obtain rain water from the Himalayas. The Himalayas was the stick round which clouds moved and water poured forth over the earth and harvest was grown and reaped. Similarly, installation of an elephant's head on the shoulder of Ganesh had practical implication of worldly wisdom and unity of different animals with mankind. It was the symbol of gold, of success in business, of the prosperity of authors and publishers. Havell was an admirer of the cult of Bhakti in Indian art which made it great and lack of which he attributed to Western art.

What struck him most was the living tradition of Indian art and secondly its educative value for which Indian masses became so refined and well versed in Indian philosophy. While Western art was confined to few connoisseurs of art, Indian art was for masses. His point was that this specialization of Western art came after Renaissance. It may be noted in this connection that this aspect of Renaissance has not missed the attention of even admirers of Western art in its present crisis. Havell's strong commonsense however prompted him to admit that both Indian and Western art must appreciate each other thereby helping mutually. His conclusion was that Indian art must develop rationalism and Western art Bhakti. This deserves consideration even at this late stage. Hence it is wrong to think that Havell's Bhakti for Indian art was blind. We can

however notice the artist in him when Havell observes that he sees something ineffable in Ajanta and in Taj Mahal.

About beauty he tried to be historical and explained the attempt to have a common standard of physical beauty for both male and female in Indian art. Such for instance is the body and waist of a lion. The long hand has similarly been explained.

Without the study of Vaishnava poems and classics of India in original he could not probably illustrate his points.

Anyway, his commonsense interpretation of Indian art bears some close connection with Indian philosophy. His emphasis was however on educative value especially of architecture and sculpture. But Indian painting, though numerically small due to depredations of nature, has a wider influence. Moreover, sculpture and painting have been done on the same principle. Being a lover of Indian art, Havell chose to omit the fact that painters had not received as much respect as a poet commanded in India as a contrast to China. In India the difference lies in emphasis on literacy.

This is true more or less of all countries. The selfconsciousness of artists has created what he condemned as coteries of art from the time of Renaissance in Europe. In fairness to E. B. Havell, it must be stated that he was not opposed to all that Renaissance implied except the particular effects on art which was the coterie mentality. The painter in West Europe forced the attention of the educated people by creating an art which could be appreciated only through the assistance of critics and connoisseurs. In India old art is almost forgotten with its ideals and idioms particularly because of the fact that education in India provides no scope for knowing either Western or Indian art. So some form of introduction becomes necessary. Painting has as much of grammar as literature has. Hence so much of writing was done by Havell and Coomarswamy. Abanindranath Tagore, as noted earlier, supplemented his reputation by composing juvenile literature in Bengali. But art has its parallel mode of expression. And that can express

adequately its ideas. Nandalal has in this respect remained true to his art. Except for some random essays on art he rarely writes. By his vision and originality he has transformed the traditional method to suit his outlook. Such subjects as Karna Kunti and Ardhanariswar have been put in a new manner. Such new lights have been thrown by him on all legendary and historical pictures. His sketches have already been referred to.

In a sense the condition of the artist had been the same all over the world. Up to the 16th century paintings in France were not initialled. What would have happened if the early Egyptian paintings were signed? They would have been wiped out in course of time. And what would happen to artists of today thousands of years hence? They too would be wiped out.

The development of individualism of artists came after the Industrial Revolution. But it must not be overstated.

When however a painter shows as much vision as a poet he has an equal right to be so recognised. The position of painters varied in different epochs of Indian history as shown by Coomarswamy. The sophistication reached by Indian drama and poetry made them subjects for enjoyment by educated people in ancient and later periods in India. But a painter had to express his ideas from monasteries and his position was not always elevated.

Nandalal seems to have solved the problem of present day artist in his own way by adopting Indian ideals with the present day psychological conditions. He has banked on the age-long experiences of Indian artists. But his task has not been completed nor is it a task to be achieved in a day. In a society dominated either by commercial interests or bureaucrats it is difficult not to be a cog in a wheel. It is the fate of poets too. But an artist can transform the society. Tagore did it in his way. So has Nandalal done in a sober and tranquil way. It is the spirit that requires to be radiated in the society.

## CHAPTER VII

### FRENCH PAINTING AND NANDALAL

As has been stated earlier, Nandalal did not hesitate to borrow from Impressionism and he told the present writer that some elements of Impressionism could be traced in Indian art. It is needless to mention that he enriched his art from a point of view which again is fundamentally different from that of French Impressionists. It is necessary here to discuss French art in brief.

There is no denying the fact that French Impressionism had its origin in photography (then just invented) and Japanese painting popular at that time in Paris, particularly to the former. It has been pointed out by Roger Fry that Impressionism meant two possible changes in art: first, viewing the things from unfamiliar aspects and secondly, the result of noting change in local colour caused by different sources of light. Roger Fry has further divided Impressionists into two groups according as they explored one or the other. According to him Bazille was perhaps the first to give the new note and colour but Manet was the most adventurous explorer of such atmospheric effects on colour, followed by Pissaro and Sisley and to some extent by Renoir. Degas found his opportunity in the unexpected angles of vision.

We find, however, a more graphic description of various schools of painting in 'Modern French Painters' by R. H. Wilensky and of Impressionists in 'The History of Impressionism' by John Rewald. Wilensky says that the Realist movement which started at the end of 1840s was a development of 1830s and 1840s. The latter had considered art primarily as a record of emotional excitement in the artist and of less importance as a record of the particular fragments of life which had caused

such excitement. The Realists on the other hand believed that all fragments of life were interesting in themselves and proper materials for art, and that the artists were required to try to record as impersonally as possible in the spirit of a scientist, because of the fact that fragments recorded were more significant than the state of mind or emotional condition of the artist. The artist must concentrate himself on recording actual experiences in day to day life because all forces of 'imaginative art' used to be considered as really nothing but 'mendacious nonsense'.

According to Wilensky, to understand Impressionism, one should bear in mind the fact that it started with Manet's pictures of the type of 'La bateau de Folkstone' and that all these pictures were covered by the definition of Realist movement. The scenes delineated there were those of everyday life. There was no exhibition of artistic subjective emotion and the artist made it clear that he had discarded all imaginative excursions.

Nevertheless, Impressionism was a development and continuation of Realist theory and had its own special characteristics. The first was the supreme importance attributed to the effect of accident on the subject and disposal of the picture.

The Impressionists tried to emphasize on the point of view that happened to be present at a particular moment when the artist was physically present. The pioneer Impressionist had therefore the feeling of design, which was produced by invention of cameras and introduction of Japanese painting in France. According to John Rewald the new phase in the history of art inaugurated by the Impressionist exhibition of 1874, did not come as a sudden outbreak of revolutionary tendencies, it was the culmination of a slow and consistent development.

The feeling of Impressionism was noticeable in the pictures like 'La bateau de Folkstone' of Manet but also in Monet's 'Le pont Neuf' and Pissaro's 'La route d' Versailles a' Lou veciennes', in Renoir's 'Canotiers a' chatou', in Sisley's 'Eeffet de neige', in Degas' 'Voiture aux courses' and 'Femn

a' Sa toilette' and in Renoir's elaborate 'Le Moulin de la Galette.'

To the Impressionists, therefore, the picture should be a record of the scene as an artist saw at the moment when he happened to be there. It is not wrong to suppose that a picture by an Impressionist of outdoor scenes should be prepared from the beginning to end at the place. That was a revolutionary step at that time because outdoor scenes used to be drawn indoors, in the seclusion of a studio, with, of course, the aid of sketches and notes. But it must be further noted that the principle of such action outdoors fully accords with that of the camera.

We shall find another corroboration of this principle when we examine the next doctrine of Impressionism. They held that colour must obviously be quick and spontaneous. They frankly believed that when an artist had sat for painting he should do so with as little waste of time as possible so that he had not missed recording as much as was humanly possible.

We should not however be blind to the fact that Impressionists were after all talented artists, though guided by certain whims which were not very artistic. Thus we notice that individual artists of Impressionist movement had their different attitudes and methods. Degas, for example, believed in the Realist-Impressionist theory that a scene must be delineated without the least alteration by the artist.

There had also been the difference from the outset between the various influences of photography on the methods of Degas, Monet and Renoir. Degas again used the language of camera in his work. That meant he concentrated on records of light and cast shadows. Monet painted his pictures by tone values. To his contribution of rainbow palette Renoir added another element of broken colours.

In fairness to the artists, we must remember their experiments with colour in their subtleties. Further, these artists did not stop at a particular point. They continued their experiments. Thus we find Gauguin leaving Paris for Tahiti. On his



return, he gave a new series of pictures. In his first Tahiti pictures 'Reverie', 'Fatata ti miti (Pres de la mer)' and 'la orana Maria (Ave Maria)', he maintained his rhythmic patterning which he had developed during his stay at Brittany. Subsequently, his art became broader, simplified but resonant in colour and deep in spirit. They were considered magnificent when brought down from 'Tahiti.

Another artist Cezanne in his old age was diffident and fumbling like Rembrandt. He had not the confidence of the primitive though many have likened him to a primitive artist. In 'La tour aux pigeons', Cezanne showed his sense of brilliant blue green colour surrounding the yellow pigeon house. His colour scheme was carefully drawn to show the single structure in the enveloping light of the sun on the background of clear blue sky.

It would appear that French Impressionists, their predecessors and subsequent schools, followed almost an identical line. The Impressionists particularly had a tendency to draw a photographic vision of a scene. But similar tendency was noticeable among Realists too. Cezanne however said: 'How hard it is to find exactly the point at which imitation of nature must cease in a picture. The painting must not smell of the model and yet one must be conscious of nature'. (Quoted from History of Impressionism, p. 430.)

As a matter of fact, in the 19th century France, artists developed an inferiority complex. They grew anxious to prove their worth in a society where science was threatening to reduce everything to utilities. The artists therefore fought shy of demonstrating their imagination and feeling. To get anywhere from this sense of isolation they began to make experiments and prove their utility. Their genuine search for values cannot be denied but their sense of uncertainty and eagerness to exhibit pictures at salon, show the futility which they admitted. Still more sad are their admissions. Monet says: 'I have the merit of having painted directly from the nature, trying to convey my impressions in the presence of the most fugitive effects and

I am distressed at having been the cause of the name given to a group of which majority was not at all Impressionist.' (History of Impressionism, p. 431) Pissaro says: 'Having found after many attempts (I speak for myself), having found that it was impossible to be true to my sensations and course to render life and movement, impossible to be faithful to the random and so admirable effects of nature, impossible to give an individual character to my drawing, I had to give up.' (Ibid., p. 408.) And Renoir comments: 'Though one should take care not to remain imprisoned in forms we have inherited, one should neither from love of progress, imagine that one can detach oneself completely from past centuries.' (Ibid., p. 430.)

In experiments however they evolved certain subtleties of colour which was remarkable. But still their restlessness of mind, feeling of insecurity and helplessness cannot be denied.

For example, Gauguin's journey to and from Tahiti was the clearest evidence, if further evidence was at all necessary, of mental disequilibrium. Their enthusiasm for as well as their decline of interest in Impressionism in a forthright manner is an instance. He says: 'Impressionism studied colour exclusively in terms of decorative effects but without freedom for they kept shackles of representation. They look for what is near the eye and not at the mysterious heart of thought.' (Ibid., p. 424.) Nandalal, though he has accepted certain aspects of Impressionism, especially its colour, is a man of entirely different outlook and philosophy as well as temperament. He lacks that restlessness and sense of insecurity. He is sure of his position and confident of the power of an artist. His attitude can be compared to that of old Indian artists, with experiences of thousand years of art and to a certain extent to a Chinese artist. It has been asserted that there had been periods of political vicissitudes in Chinese history but art maintained its serenity. It had nothing to do with political events. Even during Sung period (960-1279) when political commotion was at its height art continued its serene and unperturbed journey though those tumultuous periods of history.

Instead of being inspirers, Impressionists tended to be parasites of society. They failed to rise to the occasion offered by a transitional society. On the contrary, they lost their self-confidence. And artists losing self-confidence can only play with their whims and become isolated individuals with no purpose. Therefore it is not true, as John Rewald has stated, that Impressionism is the culmination of a slow and consistent development and it may be noted that it too was superseded by another movement of almost identical nature.

Nandalal has avoided all these extremes. To be precise, he has visualized what an artist is capable of achieving by his paintings and drawings. He need not resort to fantasies and isolation like the Impressionists. Nor should he imitate and flatter science and its votaries. Nor need he play a passive role.

Impressionists tried to reassert the power of an artist in a wrong direction. A search for primitive life in Tahiti is a symptom of that disease. Creation of coteries and mere play of colour are signs of restlessness. Nandalal is free from it because he was aware of his ideals. And he obtained the stimulus from the long history of Indian art and not from its technicalities, for which he can draw upon any source including Impressionism. His purpose is to create a new vision for contemporary life. Moreover, he has that serenity of mind which prompts him to realize the position of an artist without the unhealthy desire of becoming something other than artist or going primitive or simply becoming a technician of colour.

Impressionism is the starting point of Modern art. All the subsequent movements started as a reaction and counter-reaction against Impressionism, and Paris remains the radiating centre.

George Seurat, Paul Cezanne, Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin were all Impressionists. But they were not satisfied with that. In other words, they revolted against it in their own ways. Seurat searched for architectural harmony which was

taken up by Kandinsky about 1910. Cezanne studied nature and ancient art and found out design, and his still life pictures have designs behind them, sometimes reminding of beautiful tapestries. His apples are not imitations of nature nor are they nutritious. They simply fit in with his design. But these artists would perhaps object to the term 'beautiful' because their favourite word is expressiveness. Van Gogh believed that colour should be used to express oneself forcefully. His colour was arbitrary and not natural. His trees were like flames. What he aimed at was expression of his personal feelings.

From designs of Cezanne came Cubism and from Van Gogh came Expressionism of the 20th century. Seurat pointed the way to Abstract art.

Like Japanese prints in the 19th century, Negro sculpture influenced painting of Paris in the early years of the 20th century. Cezanne's design brought about Cubism of Picasso and Braque by about 1910. Strong reaction against Cubism and Cezanne came after World War I of 1914-18 in the form of Dadaism (Dada meaning hobby horse). Dadaism is the result of frustration after wholesale destruction of art and architecture and innocent human lives in that war. Dadaism lasted from 1916 to 1921. Its exponents used to hold meetings with two or more persons reciting poems at the same time, accompanied by loud music and the meetings used to end in confusion with intervention by the police.

On the expiry of that movement came Surrealism by about 1920. Cubism was anti-literary and the painters even refused to put titles under their pictures except for the purpose of cataloguing. But with Surrealism the literary tendency returned. So there was a reversal of the process which was started by the Impressionists. Dr. Freud was a great influence behind Surrealism though the doctor is reported to have remarked to Dali that he was more interested in the latter's conscious rather than unconscious.

Expressionism in Germany was set up by about 1920 though its French counterpart was initiated earlier. Fauvism ('wild

beast') was the art of Matisse whose colouring was more emphatic than design.

All the modern artists were keen on researches and analyses. Both Picasso and Matisse did it in their own ways. Cubism is abstract art inasmuch as it is abstracted from nature and recreated thereafter. It distorts nature and then creates it. Art is superior to nature. Art need not have any subject matter. What matters is its design and form. Hence the literary tendency was eliminated but Expressionism contained literary elements, though only slightly and with Surrealism it returned fully.

Cubism had various phases. First was analytic Cubism followed by synthetic Cubism, block Cubism and facet Cubism and ultimately curvilinear Cubism in 1920.

Surrealism was concerned with pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express verbally, in writing or by other means, the real process of thought.

Expressionism has been described as Teutonic in character and is Romantic. It is not interested in form and style like Cubism. It is introspective, emotional and mystic. As a matter of fact, Expressionism generally means everything of Modern art but it emphasizes highly personalized intuitive expressiveness where artist's æsthetic emotions are placed above all.

Klee and Chagall were German Expressionists of Blue Rider school. Matisse, who was a Fauve, remarked: 'What I am after above all is expression. . . the whole arrangement of my picture is expressive. . . composition is the art of arrangement in a decorative manner for the expression of what the painter wants.' (Encyclopædia Britannica, 17th Edition.)

It was George Seurat who sought to create movements like Neo-impressionism or Scientific Impressionism as against Romantic Impressionism of Monet and Pointillism by putting dots. Futurism preceded rise of Fascism and curiously represented fascist ideas in art.

Surrealism died slowly with the outbreak of World War II. But Abstract art survived the War. After the death of Kandin-

sky, Magnelli became popular, following liberation of Paris. There was an onrush of new young painters in the first few exhibitions of Abstract painting. It is necessary to quote P. Mondrian about Abstract art. He said: 'As a pure representation of the human spirit, art will express itself in a purified æsthetic form i.e., in an abstract form.'

Abstract art has been divided into two periods, the initial period from 1910 to 1916, being called 'Abstract Art', and the second period from 1917 onward being called 'Non-representational Art'. Abstract art has been termed as the style of 20th century art.

Their attitude towards art and society can be understood from the remarks of Casimir Malevitch, who said: 'Art is no longer content to be the servant of Church and State; it is no longer content to be illustrator of customs and costumes; it is no longer willing to have anything to do with object as such and it believes that it is capable of existing of itself . . .' (Dictionary of Abstract Painting by M. Seuphor.)

Besides, there were Synchronism, Constructivism and so on. This Modern art is international in a very narrow sense because it picked up certain aspects of foreign art to serve its defeatist purpose. What it does, is to represent the fear and helplessness and a negative philosophy which destroys all its ingenuity. A collection of Modern art might be interesting, if not a curious but cruel reminder of war and chaos.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHINESE PAINTING AND NANDALAL

What was the function of Chinese artists? Unlike Indian artists of yore, Chinese painters were not craftsmen, though absorbed in their pursuit despite historical upheavals. They were not historians nor philosophers. Their creation used to show the nature of the people and their way of thinking because Chinese painters were closely associated with calligraphy. It was clearly connected with life too. Hence Chinese art was utilitarian as well functional. It is also true of India in different senses in different periods of history.

But mistakes are likely to be committed in this sort of generalizations. In both China and India, art continued to be functional but ultimately turned out to be mechanical. The reason is that when artists become absorbed in functions of society they invariably cease to be dynamic artists and to provide mental stimulus to the people. They tend to be subservient to their patrons and become interested only in eking out their existence. A true artist has a great role to play. He is not merely a craftsman. He has a vision which inspires people with profound meaning and interpretation of life. When artists fail to grapple with the situation they become simply artisans.

It is however necessary to elaborate the difference between paintings of Nandalal and those of the Chinese artists.

Nandalal's paintings have been divided by Manindra Gupta into several series: such as Mahabharata series on wooden panels in Sir J. C. Bose's house, Ramayana pictures in Ramananda Chatterji's Edition of the book, Saiva pictures in Kumarsambhava of Kalidasa. Besides there are the Santal paintings, Santiniketan scenes and panellings.

This division is misleading because the pictures were created by certain demands and do not necessarily reflect the development of his artistic sensibilities. In fact no clear cut division of his art can be made. It has followed its own course and moved according to its own logic. It should however be regretted that he got so little opportunity of wall painting as in Santiniketan and Bose Institute.

Anyway, we must be content with what he has contributed. We are to scrutinize the stimulus behind his creations. As noted earlier, Nandalal was never ashamed of borrowing from other sources though assimilating them in his own way. As a result he was always careful about his art. He learned from Indian art because he was thoroughly familiar with Indian tradition and background. He knows where he stands. Besides, he has occasionally made a reference to Chinese ideals but that also is true to a limited extent. He quoted a Chinese painter who remarked that painting was done from impression of mind.

It must further be noted that the late E. B. Havell traced the sources of Indian art and he was taken more seriously by the Indians rather than by his fellow countrymen who considered him to be a 'fanatic'. He himself being an artist did not try to be very argumentative but chose to make an impassioned appeal for the contribution of Indian art and its role in world culture. Some of the outstanding points of Havell have been made precise by Dr. Reginald Le May in 'A Concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam', wherein he says that there are two points to be noted about Eastern art. First, the purpose of the latter is to show a spiritual import other than the subject and secondly, a technique of putting simple lines in paintings as distinguished from details of physical aspects to be found in Western art. 'In the Eastern artist,' he writes, 'there is an innate feeling for economy of line in delineating his subject. The Western artist with his intense individualism wishes the spectator to see the forms of scenes, exactly as he sees, down to the last detail.'



It must be noted that individualism is the growth of a certain phase of history and as such it cannot remain the property of any region. Individualism can grow in an Eastern country such as India and the question arises — what would be the shape of art with the extensive history of Indian art at its background? Nandalal's position in art is exactly determined by that proposition. In fact, he visited China and was impressed by their art and he too acquired superb subtlety in his art, independent of Chinese art and evolving his own colour and technique.

As it is, Le May's description covers Chinese paintings. Havell was of the view that China had greater painting and India greater sculpture and architecture. In China calligraphy and painting went together for thousands of years. Nandalal developed certain aspects of Indian art. He closely studied Indian sculpture. It has been noted that linear paintings were the peculiarity of Indian art too but later decadence came when excessive decoration became the rule both in India and Siam. This proposition of Dr. May is however doubtful.

Meanwhile it is necessary to probe into Chinese art. Carter writes in 'Four Thousand Years of Chinese Art': 'The linear tendency in Chinese painting is rarely found in Buddhist art; all the materials we have lead one to infer that Chinese thought and moral ideals influenced its Buddhist pictorial art more than its traditional style and painting.' But Chinese art was profoundly influenced by Buddhist art though as a religion it remained foreign. It would further appear that Japanese art, which has a continuous history, flourished after introduction of Buddhism in Japan. But Chinese painting was an old art and respected like literature long before the advent of Buddhism there. Buddhism brought a new message and faith to the Chinese who, it must be remembered, are no imitators. They can develop a thing in their own way but never imitate others' ways. Hence Carter says: 'For the epoch-making new idea that came to Chinese art with Buddhism was its glorification of human body as the dwelling place of the divine. This idea

gave to the individual an importance never before known in China. Before Buddhism individual's place in the universe has been considered by the Chinese unimportant compared to the continuance of the family and of the race as a whole as well as to the infinite eternal elements in nature.' (p. 133.) Similar influence of Indian art has been described by Dr. Le May. Indian religious art and culture, according to him, seem naturally to have an extra fascination for the indigenous people of all these territories (Siam, Cambodia, Ceylon, Indonesia) no doubt owing to the attraction offered by Buddhism and Hinduism, while Chinese art, not bearing any particular religious message, made but little impression, in spite of the fact that the Chinese too sailed the south seas in search of trade from early times.

Thus we obtain a glimpse of two arts, Indian and Chinese, from two different authors. It becomes evident that the main attraction was not so much of æsthetic quality of art as the message of religion, whether Hinduism or Buddhism. In other words, it is the deeper meaning of life in art that used to draw the attention of outsiders. Chinese art, on the other hand, has throughout ages excelled in drawing animals and landscapes in subtle lines with blank spaces interspersed between them rather than human figures. So we find in Nandalal the same emphasis on human figures though landscapes and animals have their due places. For the Chinese human life was a new source to draw upon after the introduction of Buddhism.

In Nandalal we find that though he is not attached to any religious group, he is imbued with his interpretation of deeper meaning of life and his sublime faith in man which makes him traditional in essence though not in grouping. Though Buddhism faded away from India as a religious system, many a section of the society remembered the tradition, born centuries ago, long before the birth of Buddhism. Nandalal's insight penetrated into that aspect of Indian philosophy. That is why he is less inclined towards formalities of traditional art

and never hesitated to borrow from foreign sources. He knows that Indian art is measured by insight and depth of soul.

The point on which one cannot agree with the late E. B. Havell and Dr. R. Le May is that it is not the monopoly of Eastern art to know the spiritual aspects as they call it. All arts all over the world have done it in their own ways and the Eastern art had its secular aspects too. Indian art had the tradition of attaching importance to human beings and all the seriousness attached to it. Formalities are mistakenly considered to be its specialities. To a serious Indian artist his art is a serious mission of his life.

So it is with Nandalal. But to the Chinese painting was of as much importance as scholarship. So Carter writes: 'The close relationship between calligraphy and painting made China's pictorial art an intimate and vital part of the entire spiritual complex and development of the Chinese people. For this reason, the significance of painting in China stands without parallel in the art and painting anywhere else in the world.'

Formerly painting used to be done on cotton and paper and it was during the T'ang dynasty that painting began to be done on finer silk. During this period realistic landscapes, lifelike portraits and paintings of animals, particularly of horses, used to be done.

As a matter of fact, there was no clear cut division between Eastern and Western art upto 15th century when perspective or three-dimensional element entered into painting. It is highly debatable whether this was good or bad but the fact is that it exists and it is the first step towards photography. Otherwise the difference between Indian and Chinese art is as wide as that between Indian and European. In Renaissance art of Europe, human figures have been glorified. But human figures have always found prominence in Indian art with all religious and philosophical association. But Chinese art specialised in animals and landscapes and painting in China is considered to be an accomplishment of literate people. Carter has remarked that while colours to disguise are not

often used in writing, a great deal of painting has always been done in monochrome in which the minutest careful shading of the brush stroke created the light and shades that gave atmosphere to the painting. The same characteristics are required and appreciated in Chinese writing. Though Chinese painting was a means of accomplishment for Chinese elite, yet it had this much of difference with European art that the latter had no such proximity with calligraphy and accomplishment. But even in Europe attitude to painting differs from country to country. The significance of art is not the same in Holland and England. Though Britain is not a painting nation, yet portrait painting used to be patronised by the leisured class of that country. French, Italian or Dutch artists used to take a more serious view of art than their counterparts in Britain. Indians, as noted, viewed art from an entirely different angle of vision. But that attitude is and was not uniform in all parts of the country. Havell attached importance to Indian art for spreading education. In different parts again varying art forms preached their respective ideals. In Bengal for instance, folk art of the *potuas* depicted pictures of gods and goddesses mostly. The clay modelling used to serve the same purpose, namely supplying images for periodical worship of gods. In the South, dancing and sculpture were devoted to the respective religious duties. Finally, attitude of individual artists differed. In the last analysis, we notice Nandalal as an individual and national artist developing his own personality. But one thing is certain. He never accepted art as a pastime either for himself or for others. It was his serious devotion to art that has kept him away from any other preoccupation. Another remarkable point is that he never belonged to any coterie. He accepted some aspects of the old subject for orienting them for his objective.

In Saiva pictures we find the same extent of his care and precision as in Mahabharata pictures.

But he was drawn by Chinese artists neither for their forms nor content but for their love and respect for art itself.

In fact, Chinese art originated from magic. Popular imagination associated the art of magic with that of painting in China. Great artists were supposed to possess magical power. In China a religious painter is better known for his landscapes. Hence religion and philosophy had never been the strong point of their art. Therefore there is great difference between Indian and Chinese painting. China adopted Buddhism but adapted it to its purpose. The difference has been clearly demarcated by Dr. Le May: 'I am told that in ancient days in Siam, many of the images of the Buddhists were made by the priests themselves within closed walls, so that no profane nor curious prying eyes should watch them at their work.' (Buddhist Art in Siam.)

That is the outlook of an Indian artist. Nandalal's seriousness amounts to that and it is the Indian attitude to art rather than the Chinese way of achieving distinction in letters and art. The difference with him lies in the fact that he does not belong to any church or temple.

In China old tradition lives inspite of Buddhism. 'Although', as Carter observes, 'Buddhism was generally accepted everywhere, the best artists of the period, among them Ku K'ai-Chi, found in the South, despite its political confusion and the weakness of the imperial house at Nanking, a more congenial atmosphere in which to continue the old tradition.' In northern China, different races have replaced each other thus enriching the cultural tradition. It must further be noted that in China sculpture was introduced mainly with Buddhism. After the T'ang age realism was more marked in non-Buddhist sculpture. There were the terra-cotta figures. T'ang imperialism assisted the growth of the realist school of non-Buddhist sculpture. Buddhist sculpture however became extinct after some time.

So great a source of Nandalal's inspiration—sculpture—was never a strong point in Chinese art.

The character of Chinese painting becomes clearer in course of Chinese history, which is marked by political vicissitudes as of any other country. The house of T'ang fell. Five

dynasties came in succession within 50 years. And in 960 A.D. Sung dynasty was established giving peace and order to the land.

During the reign of Sung dynasty again, there were many celebrated painters among whom Li Lund-milien was an outstanding one. In his earlier years he used to paint horses but was subsequently advised by a Buddhist priest to take up religious painting to avoid re-incarnation. But his Buddhist *arhats* were not ascetic, and were sometimes represented in the paintings as under the influence of wine. It appeared as from other instances that the spirit of Buddhism was absent from Chinese painters except in certain forms. Buddhist images and ideals remained foreign to them except when they were needed as solace in the world.

Chinese painting continued its march on traditional lines—landscapes and animal pictures. Landscape painting had had its origin in Han times. T'ang dynasty saw its development and it culminated in the Sung period during which Li Ching became famous. It is interesting to note that Li Ching belonged to the family of T'ang. His inspiration was said to be drawn from wine. But this was typically characteristic of Chinese painters and painting. The painters used to hail from high families and painting was considered to be a matter of accomplishment.

The landscape painting, however, made further progress during the Northern Sung period in which Kuo Hsi was equally a painter and writer on art. His painting was stated to have blended 'far-away effect with suggestiveness'.

His son described him as follows: 'Whenever father began to paint he opened all the windows, cleared his desk, burned incense in the right and left, washed his hands and cleaned his inkstone. By doing this his spirit was calmed and his thoughts composed. Not until this did he begin to paint.' (Four Thousand Years of Chinese Painting.)

Kuo Hsi's own advice to artists was said to be to try to understand other people's condition and emotion behind their

activities. Kuo Hsi was reputed to have drawn winter scenes—moist and beautiful scenes of Yangtze Valley.

We therefore notice that in the best periods of Chinese painting, attempts were made to entertain people and draw inspiration from their life. The advice of Kuo Hsi related to landscape which formed the bulk of his paintings. In course of time landscape painting in China developed subtleties on subjects like mists and snows.

Nandalal, however, appreciated their love of art in China during his visit with Tagore but certainly not their desire to achieve distinction. Most of Nandalal's paintings relate to human beings and serious subjects, as noted earlier. Kuo Hsi went nearer the point when he stated that an artist should try to understand the promptings behind action. But that was only on the surface. He could not go beyond that to the deeper meaning of life and its interpretation. And that makes a great deal of difference because the whole of Indian history of painting is replete with human beings, or gods and goddesses in human forms. That is, however, not the case with Chinese painting which is full of animals and landscapes—the reason of its popularity. Nandalal is traditional in the sense that he has maintained the philosophical seriousness of Indian painting, his subject matter having been chosen from religious treatises but always tinged with his breadth of outlook, his humour and sense of tragedy.

The Western critics and collectors find the difference between the Western and the Chinese paintings in the latter's blank spaces and lines full of minutest details. In addition to fidelity to nature Chinese paintings of Sung dynasty were done in folded scrolls like photographs and some of them bore an impression of air photography. Apart from this photographic character they had an unearthly atmosphere which was believed to have sprung from the feeling that arose due to close proximity with nature. This profundity of feeling in Chinese landscape distinguished them from Western art generally. The Sung dynasty painters had superb landscapes because

of the fullness of natural beauty in the South, particularly in Yangtze valley. This remoteness and spiritual character of Chinese paintings are quite different from the approach of Indian painting in general and Nandalal's in particular. The point can further be clarified by a study of the history of Chinese painting.

During the reign of Emperor Hui Tsang, Chinese culture reached a high peak of development. Li Langmien and Kuo Hsi flourished during this period. He himself was an artist and he had great collections of paintings. His fall however was caused by the weakness of the Northern Sung dynasty. While the first Sung Emperor saved the country by military success he achieved internal order by reducing military strength and adding more power to the civilians. As a result of that, power to resist foreign aggression declined.

And when the barbarians invaded, all attempts of the Emperor failed and he was taken prisoner and all collection of paintings looted.

After the fall of the capital in the North, a younger son was enthroned in the South first at Nanking as capital and then at Hangchow. Then began the South Sung dynasty.

Again, China had three religions in succession, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, While in the North, Buddhism was exhausted, Taoism came in. In South China Buddhism gave a new impetus to spiritual life. Ch'an Buddhism was derived from the Sankrit expression 'dhyan' which implied meditation. To the painters forced to go South due to invasion of barbarians, Ch'an was a source of relief. In the desolate monasteries and temples and brilliant scenes near Hangchow, higher form of Buddhism made much room for meditation and contemplation.

It would appear however that Buddhism was not looked upon with favour by Chinese historians of painting. Mu Chi, a Buddhist priest who was a talented painter, was Cha'n Buddhist. Little is known of him but he is reputed to have painted dragons, tigers, monkeys, storks and ducks, human



figures and landscape—the list does not bear any relation to his religion. But his influence transcended the frontiers of China and extended to Japan where Ch'an became Zen Buddhism.

According to Alexander Soper and Robert Treat Paine Japanese feeling for art is summed up in the problem of decorative designing. Japanese painters are not scholar-painters in the Chinese sense but they come from court and temple and craft and professional schools. To the Japanese the world is an object of beauty and of pleasure. The basic gaiety and pleasure were occasionally tinged with Buddhist ideas of transitoriness and sometimes reflecting Chinese ethical valuations. Japanese art is marked by vitality throughout its history of 13 or 14 centuries. These paintings were loyal to their feudal traditions but that tradition withered with Buddhist painting. Losa and Kano schools brought further changes but their vitality and gaiety remained. Anyway, the procedure of the Southern artists was this. When the mind of the artist was filled with inspiration drawn from quietness and beauty that surround him, he would return to his hut and would put a piece of paper or a silk on a neatly laid out table and delineate his feeling with the aid of a brush. The great Southern artists like Ma Yuan and Hsia Kua were found roaming in the mountains enveloped by windswept clouds and the still wilderness of the valley. 'The spiritual verities of Sung dynasty painters are as true as they were true wherever souls of men are liberated to perceive the spiritual potentialities of the world in which we live and move and have our being', as Carter puts it.

The feature that distinguishes Indian from Chinese painting is the difference in approach in spite of the apparent resemblance in common religious adherence. Sometimes perhaps they reached the same destination through divergent means.

The same Buddhism which produced Ch'an and Zen in China and Japan respectively, brought about Tantrikism in Pala period in Bengal. It is needless to add in this connection that Tantrikism existed in India long before Pala period and

had sometimes been a parallel system to that of Vedic culture. According to B. Rowland, Buddhism of the Pala period represents the outgrowth of Mahayana described as Tantrikism, a synthetic assimilation into Buddhism of many elements of Hindu origin such as the concept of the Sakti or female energy of Buddhism and the reliance on magic spells.

According to several authors, the Bengal art of the Pala period had influenced Borobudur at Java because of the strong resemblance to the temple at Paharpur, Bengal, both in plan and elevation in successive levels for circumbulation existing in Java temples in Loro Jongrang and Candi Sewu at Prambanam and also the vast temple mountain at Borobudur.

Art of Tibet is in certain respects only another example of the prolongation of the religious art of Bengal under Pala and Sena dynasties.

During Gupta period painting was not confined to ecclesiastical matters. But according to Vishnudharmottaram, dancing should form part of the education of a painter.

In plastic type we find expression of human consciousness in religion, science and art. Indian Nataraja thus is considered to be a logical and impassioned statement of the conception of life as an eternal becoming, Siva's dance being symbolised in creation and destruction.

In course of centuries there have been very few changes in the way of presenting the divine in artistic terms, which have been fixed in dances of India. So Rowland writes: 'Just as the essentials of the Indian temples of the Gupta period and the Hindu Renaissance are iconographically and technically present in the ashler dolmens of prehistoric times and the Vedic altars of brick so that final triumph of the Dravidian genius, the Nataraja, is only slightly removed from the mysterious dancing figure from Mahenjodaro. In architecture either the simplest or the most baroque fabric can symbolize the world and the body of God, just as the elementary ideograph of a dancer in sandstone and the dynamic image of the Chola metal-worker's art can symbolize the endless change

within cosmic scheme.' (The Art and Architecture of India, p. 194.)

But in this connection it must be recalled that many critics were indignant with the late E. B. Havell for his enthusiasm for Indian art. Vincent Smith, for example, quoted Gauguin of all persons, to prove the universality of art and that there was no room for 'æsthetic nationalism'. Indeed, Havell was more enthusiastic than persuasive. But Smith forgot that art was as much the conception of universality as of individuality which cannot but be different according to national background and personal touches.

The difference becomes clearer in a comparative study of Indian and Chinese art as well as Indian art and Nandalal's art. Chinese painting thrived under the influence of Buddhism. Its glorious period is said to be Tang period and Sung period of both North and South. The Chinese accepted Buddhism in their own way. As has been shown, sometimes it assumed the form of painting drunk *arhats*. During Southern Sung period painting became demonstration of relationship with nature. Pictures of landscape and animals continued to form the subject-matter of painting as before but from another point of view. But it must be noted that the Chinese way was more technical than spiritual. Throughout their whole history of painting, the Chinese never liked the foreign religion Buddhism. Their Che'n Buddhism was their own adaptation of Buddhism. The 'mysterious' aspect as referred to by Carter was their technical skill. Another point that must be noted was that Southern Sung period was a time of political defeat and decay. The painters were fugitives from the North concentrating their mind on meditation when they could not live in the North, the material prosperity having gone. Hence the painters concentrated on technical aspects which were particularly blank spaces and subtle lines. How vivid were the geese or herdsmen running with cattle during storm. The former was known to be the 'noisiest' picture of the world. But then, the Northern Mongols tried to revive art which could not be.

So art flourishes under particular conditions and develops according to individual and collective approach. The mystery and message of the Southern Sung dynasty was therefore technical and verging on frustration.

There was certainly no philosophy of significance behind them. Nevertheless, that is Chinese painting with all its glories and greatness which can never be denied on the ground of 'æsthetic nationalism'. In short, there would always be a different outlook, national and individual, which must be distinguished from the vague conception of universality of art, least of all from the authority of Gauguin.

Coming back to our point, Nandalal is a great Indian artist in spite of his not belonging to any religious creed.

So the approach of Indian art was, rightly or wrongly, different. Indian artists had not always the elevated position which Chinese artists had because of the close proximity of Chinese painting and calligraphy.

The Indian painter was reduced to the status of an artisan though not in all periods. But painters in India had to adopt a serious view devoting their life to art. Thus the dancing tradition prevailed in South India and at Manipur in the East.

Due to political upheavals in northern India, much of the artistic tradition was lost. The existence of dancing tradition at Manipur up to the present time with their Natmandirs might be due to the existence of a semblance of political freedom there. That was unlike the condition prevalent in the rest of North India. The dancing hall or Natmandirs of Manipur and Manipuris outside Manipur still play a predominant part in their social life.

In contrast, the plight of folk artists of Bengal, such as *potuas*, is sad. With the extinction of Pala art, Bengal had no living painting tradition.

Hence we cannot but be struck by the political factor in the life of artists. Nandalal's importance lies in his appreciation of the history of India in general and of art in particular.

Drawing his inspiration from old sculpture and folk art, he has made art living through paints and pencils. As if the whole history of Indian art began to speak with the touch of his brush and pencil! It is not the colours and pencils that mattered but it is his artistic soul and philosophic touches that have made his art great and living. Art regenerated by Abanindranath Tagore received new impetus from Nandalal. His art has great importance to Indians for his vision. He may have derived some technical help from China but his chief source is Indian art and his approach is individual and his vision his own.

## CHAPTER IX

### INDIAN ART IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Nandalal, it appears, received certain amount of genuine inspiration from neighbouring countries of India, which provided shelter to migrating Indians during political upheaval. Dr. Le May writes: 'It is also recorded that in Kyanzithain times large number of devout Buddhists, fleeing from persecution in North India, migrated to Burma and even as far as Siam. Many came to Pagan, and the construction of wonderful Ananda temples by Kyanzith is said to be directly due to the inspiration he received from eight Indian Buddhist monks who told him of the great cave temple of Ananta in the Udaigiri hills of Orissa. This temple of Ananda which was built in Ugo is the first of the great temples of Pagan called 'caves' (Buddhist Art in Siam, p. 99.)

It would be a mistake to think that the great works of art in neighbouring countries were mere imitations of those in India. These were executed with superb skill by the migrant artists from India, who had no place in India.

Religious persecution and migration of Buddhist artists reveal a forgotten chapter of Indian religious history. It shows that religious persecution was prevalent in India in as much intensity as in any other country and transition from Buddhism to Brahmanism was not so smooth as it is made out to be.

Anyway, the arts of these countries had had their origin mostly from Pala period of Bengal. Pala dynasty was the last Buddhist stronghold in India. With the disappearance of Palas, Hindu system raised its head with the vigour usual for revival. Chronologically speaking, Pala art was at its crest in the 9th century A.D. The images were mainly Buddhistic and

Brahmanical figures were few in number. In the 10th century, Brahmanical figures began to increase and by the 12th century Vishnu images were overwhelmingly large in number.

It has been noticed that Burma and Siam were more interested in images of Buddha himself than in those of Bodhisatwas. As a matter of fact, they were not interested in the niceties of Buddhism but in the personality of Buddha. Mahayana Buddhism, prevalent in Bengal during the reign of Palas, did not reach those countries. In Bengal Buddhist art was less popular than Brahmanical art of gods and goddesses because the latter was the art of the monks with whose extinction the art died. By the 11th century Nalanda missionaries resorted to Pagan and Burmese and the Siamese accepted Buddhism according to their inclinations.

Buddhism in Siam was very liberal and tolerant. The images of Siva and Indra were never considered to be inimical to Buddhism but Indra and Siva were believed to be protectors of Buddha and his works.

Indeed there had been battles and destruction within Siam. Disappearance of Angkor therefore was no mystery. In 1448 the Kingdom of Siam had absorbed its neighbour Suk'otai, overpowered Cambodia and Angkor was destroyed during that period.

But art of Siam is not to be judged by battles, conquests and killing of human beings. As Dr. Le May has concluded: 'The real greatness of a people lies in its contribution to that expression of the human spirit which is called by the name of 'art' and there can be no doubt that, in the last, by that contribution will the people be judged. The question will be asked—not whom have you conquered and how many have you killed in battle, but, what have you done to enrich and develop the "spirit" of mankind? If only the will to create were greater than the will to destroy, no height of glory would be unattainable and man would cease to be a savage.' (Buddhist Art in Siam, p. 150.)

This art of Siam and Burma had vital links with Bengal

of Pala period. Though there was adaptation of the art, the spirit behind Indian and Siamese was the same. It came out of the genuine spiritual being of the masses of the people. The national expression of faith in Buddha was the sincerest feeling. Siamese and their art was therefore never entertainment and accomplishment. This serious import of Siamese art made it one with Indian art in general and Bengal art in particular.

Having an innate feeling for art of Bengal, Nandalal imbibed that spirit and his art bears a close resemblance to that of those countries. The relation of his art with French and Chinese painting is superficial but a spiritual affinity exists between his art and that of Siam.

It must be borne in mind that greatness of art cannot be sustained long after the decline of political power. The destruction of Angkor due to political vicissitudes should be noted. A minimum amount of security is necessary for promotion and growth of art.

Otherwise great achievements are wiped out of existence. Nandalal, after a search of lost threads of Indian art, realized the fact deeply. He was always aware of the political significance of art. This awareness gave him an impetus which permeated his art.



## CHAPTER X

### THE MAN

A student of Nandalal happened to have introduced himself as a disciple of the artist to a non-Indian who promptly replied that Nandalal was not only a great artist but a great man too. This statement does not necessarily imply that all great artists are invariably great men. It depends upon the specific art of that artist and his view of art.

We can cite the instance of Gauguin as referred to earlier. He left Paris for Tahiti where too he did not find any peace. As a matter of fact, he was betrayed by Tahitians. At the end he became quarrelsome and could not stay anywhere he went. His last days were very restless.

Again, one can cite the instance of the Chinese artist who, for fear of reincarnation, drew pictures of Buddhist *arhats* who were drunk. In contrast, Nandalal spent thirty years in Santiniketan and is still staying there after retirement. He is a quiet and unassuming man never running after sensation. So the difference lies in the philosophy of his life. His whole conception of art lies in his integral view of life. He thinks of balanced life of the society of which he is a member. As a result he analyses a thing and does not run after a mirage. He has searched for variety in the place where he lived. Santiniketan and Santals formed subject matters of his painting. He knew if he had not peace here, he would not get it anywhere. Though psychoanalysts generally are not accurate, Jung tried to find out some 'archetypes' as primordial images appearing in dreams and unusual states of mind which are according to him 'buried treasures from which mankind ever and anon has drawn and from which it has raised up its gods and demons and all those potent and almighty thoughts without which man

ceases to be man'. (Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, p. 68.) Without going into the details on Jungian analysis we can say that Nandalal tried to find out treasures of Indian mind from the study of ancient beliefs and stories which provided materials for him. Such study has provided him with great faith in himself and his art.

As a man he is a bit absent-minded. His date of birth, as given by him to different persons, does not tally with each other. If he says that one particular picture was done in 1908, one often finds, to his great astonishment, that another date was inscribed at the back of the picture.

But he is not indifferent to his art. Even small sketches receive his absolute attention and he realises the seriousness of the subject. He goes to the root of the matter.

The cause of misery of Gauguin is that despite his migration to Tahiti and living in a hut, his relation with his own mind and nature was not integrated. The taller the tree the deeper its roots should go. By migration he became still more restless in life and subject to any storm that blew and very unstable.

The irony is that he brought back a Tahitian woman with him and had to break his ankle in a brawl over a remark about her. When Gauguin was in hospital the woman betrayed him. In his search for stability, Gauguin made his life more unstable and rootless. His mind remained almost untamed and uncivilized. This flight from civilization and Bohemianism are due to social rigidity of 19th century and are an offshoot of Impressionism. The trait that has made Nandalal restful and tied to the soil is his mental training. He has accommodated himself to nature and society while developing himself. The beauty of Santiniketan and the simplicity of Santals have charmed him as much as the classical beauty of Indian art. He is living with his instincts and mind balanced.

As a matter of fact, an artist's role is to express his sensibilities. It, therefore, springs from his inner self and outer circumstances combined. It should bring greater harmony in life. And whenever this inner man does not find expression in true

atmosphere the artist goes wild. That is why Gauguin is not alone to suffer. Sensitive men like Gauguin and Van Gogh rebelled against the hypocrisy and injustice of 19th century society.

Material prosperity brought about by science in the last century has removed man from his roots in the soil. This has caused further disharmony in the mind of an artist because he is more sensitive. Social upheaval can upset him more easily than others. What Nandalal achieved and sought was harmony with him and society. But French artists never tried to find that root. They became more and more rootless and in their eagerness theory was piled upon theory each of which was believed to be the last word of history.

Thus, for instance, came Cubism with which some Indian artists toyed and it was considered 'a grand, austere and deliberate pictorial architecture'. It was an abstract art developed in 1908-12 and was believed to be based on 'reason as a symbol of metaphysical order'. It was spoken of as a classical art and Western too. The distinction is that it has straight lines, geometrical forms and circles whereas Eastern art has organic lines and rhythms.

Cubism became the expression of reason and classicism, reached its final stage when Ozenfant turned it to classical purism in 1918-26. Meanwhile, Picasso and Braque along with others made experiments of decorative and empirical variety. Seurat in 1880s made scientific study of linear and colour aspects in classical way. Cezanne also experimented with architecture after his Impressionist period. Thus Seurat Exhibition was held in 1905. Cezanne's was held in 1904 and 1907. The latter published his dicta in 1907 which runs thus: 'Tout dans la nature se modèle selon, la sphère le cone et le cylindre. Il faut s'apprendre à peindre sur ces figures simples'. (Modern French Painters, p. 202.) Translated literally it reads, 'All objects in nature are modelled after the sphere, the cone and the cylinder. They teach to paint these figures simply, with knowledge.'

An art movement cannot exist on dicta and theories only unless it can speak for itself. That is why all the art movements in France with a grandiose beginning die a natural death. There perhaps lies their weakest point. Nandalal did never try to set up such a movement. His sole concern is always with new subjects. Hence he is never found to run after a chimera. Those who consider Bengal School of painting as a movement like pre-Raphaelites, did neither understand Bengal School nor pre-Raphaelites.

This so-called Bengal School is a rebirth of a movement which developed during centuries due to efforts made by many devoted artists of all religious and philosophical groups. Following the predecessors, Nandalal also found the spirit of Indian art and realised that this was the line in which he could develop himself as an artist. So there was the integration of the artist and the man. But movements like Cubism or Futurism started with all the pretension of classicism but ended abruptly with the mood of the artist because these were symptoms of some disease of mind and not of artistic sense, whereas Bengal School sprang from the urge of Indian life as a whole. Nandalal is a sober product of Bengal School. In other words, he has recognised the heritage of Indian art and learnt the best use of it. He has therefore re-interpreted the past as well as contemporary events in his own way.

An artist becomes great by dint of his ability of going beyond his time and space. Nandalal is great by that standard. He has created a new definition of the artist by his art and personality.

## CHAPTER XI

### NANDALAL AND RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Nandalal makes feeling references to Tagore. To understand Tagore, it is needless to note, one must be fairly acquainted with his Bengali writings. This is true not only of his literary works but also of his paintings. He was not a painter by training nor by choice. Painting seemed to have been thrust upon him. His painting started from his corrections of poems. Painting followed those scribbles.

But what is the nature of his painting? It has confounded his admirers. Some attribute it to his psychology, others to modern French painting or German Expressionism. But among different schools of French painting, it appears to approach Surrealism.

Indeed, there was a series of experiments in painting prevalent in France before and after World War I of 1914-18. The character of these movements can be visualised from the pronouncements of sponsors of some of these movements.

First of all, we may take up Dadaism. From the beginning the Dadaists launched a nihilist and anarchic movement calling for negation of all systems, the destruction of all recognised forms.

Chirico, a Surrealist painter, has described thus: 'Have you ever noticed the singular effect of beds, wardrobes, armchairs, divans, tables when one suddenly sees them in the streets in the midst of unaccustomed surroundings, as happens when one is moving, or in the quarters of the town where dealers put part of their stock on the pavement.' (Modern French Painters, p. 294.)

An identical movement was Futurism. They seemed to have taken full advantage of psychoanalyses introduced by Dr. Freud, Jung and Adler.

All the painters were, however, not satisfied with any particular doctrines. They used to drift from one to the other. Thus arose Neo-surrealism which has been defined as 'pure psychic automaton by means of which one sets out to express verbally, in writing or in any other manner, the real function of thought, it is dictation by thought without any control by reason or any other æsthetic or moral pre-occupation'.

Pablo Picasso, the Spanish artist, has experimented with many of these doctrines. His 'Femmes éfrrayées au bord de la mer' (1923) is an illustration of his Surrealist painting. But he did not stick to any doctrine. He remarked: 'The artist absorbs and exteriorizes. That is the whole secret of art. Abstract art is not just painting, it is also drama.' (Modern French Painters.) Hence Pablo Picasso is supposed to stand head and shoulders above the Neo-surrealist or Communist or Fascist contempt for æsthetic, Expressionist and Abstract architectural art.

It must be noted that Tagore had no such theoretical predilection in painting. The first intimation he gave was in his letters to Rothensteine about his 'production of pictures'.

But that was a period when he was making new experiments with ideas. He was being continuously attacked by a section of writers at home. But though hurt, he was forging ahead with his new ideas because vilifying Tagore is an old pastime of new writers of Bengal. He was, however, re-examining his old ideas and forms and diving into the past. His works of that period bear the impress. He was writing prose-poems, which, as he admitted, were designed to express those ideas, not within the jurisdiction of rhymes.

Now what was the force working behind the grotesque pictures of Surrealism and Neo-surrealism? The artists were either disgusted or disillusioned with existing values of Western civilization. That is why they were keen on seeing misplaced divan and other furnitures of drawing room, which they so long took for granted. They asked you whether you had watched a statue in a lonely museum. That inspires awe and

fear, which even Picasso sought to instil in the visitors of his picture noted above.

So these movements were the outcome of disillusionment caused by World Wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45. Out of fury, artists aimed more at destruction rather than creation. Hence the objective of these movements was neither a healthy nor a desirable one. The artists were frustrated and bereft of any hope. So they revolted against all the existing values of æsthetics and society.

But was it the same motive which prompted Tagore to paint? He was indeed tired of his creations. He craved for the freshness of early creation. He seemed then to be fettered by his own creation. Hence he wanted to break these fetters. But there was another aspect of the thing. There was the conception of horrible gods and goddesses of India. This has been referred to in another chapter. That was the mythmaking function of man. Tagore therefore delved into a realm which was uncharted for long. He sought to find out new values. His background was different from French painters. His outlook was not similar. What Tagore did in his prose-poems was to express those aspects neglected otherwise. But he realized that there are ideas which cannot be expressed in poems too. They can be drawn or painted. There painting is a parallel language for expression. These subjects are not physical images but imaginary aspects of man.

The great points about his pictures are, first, coloration and secondly, rhythm. It was Tagore's view that it is for them to express and not to explain. They have nothing ulterior behind their appearance. But they express some hidden lights of human nature. It is a mistake to consider that human mind has only dark forces underneath it. It has hidden beauties and glow. In all these human figures, he has drawn, we find the inner glow of man. Not only has the inner beauty of human mind appealed to him as in the 'Head study' but inner beauty of nature has drawn him too. Thus we find his exquisite picture 'Tree' whose colour, movement and rhythm are particu-

larly fascinating. One feels impelled to look at the golden flowers falling and the beauty of the tree.

The crooked smile of the man in his 'Head study' is not alone that attracts attention but it is the softer touches that charm. Even in his fantastic figures, Tagore has given softer touches.

He felt drawn towards a change from his poems but he has never forgotten rhythm and subtler side of his poetry.

While discussing Tagore's painting, Nandalal has thrown some new light on his own ideas about painting in general and Indian painting in particular. Though Tagore was not trained in any school of painting, he 'followed the Indian tradition. In his pictures there is more suggestion than an attempt at detailed expression. In Indian art too, line and colour are of secondary importance, the primary consideration being the suggestion that they conveyed through their rhythmic blending'.

Nandalal then goes on to make a distinction between Eastern and Western art. In the latter, art is viewed from a scientific angle and mathematical accuracy in proportion. Hence follows three dimensions—form and light and shade. But in Indian painting there are only two dimensions. They are painted either on flat walls or paper. That had also been Tagore's method.

Nandalal further explains the difference. To him, objectivity has been carried too far in the West where the artist of the realist school is concerned with 'correct technique in presentation of an object'. But an artist must express the reality behind the object. Tagore has mastered that reality behind object which is rhythm. That had always been the Indian method. The inherent trend of Indian painting was mastered by Tagore but he expressed his personality in his own way. And he particularly stressed the reality behind object. That is why we see glows and complexities in his study of figures and trees. Even his 'Animal Study' shows that inner light. Tagore had always been fascinated by the various beauties of the earth. He tried to fathom some of the hidden beauties of man, animal and



nature through his brush. This idea closely followed his ideal in literature. There also his approach can be distinguished from that of Western art. All the movements ranging from Dadaism to Neo-surrealism are entirely different from the spirit of Tagore and Nandalal. Nor can Tagore be classified as Expressionist because, though he shared with the Western artists a feeling of change of values after the World War I, his approach was undoubtedly dissimilar. He was never out for destruction nor to strike awe in the heart of the art lovers. He felt that the animal world and plant world have more hidden beauty in them than man has realized so far. It was his feeling as he has expressed in poems that there are more things to be known and beauty to be created and enjoyed. It was his conviction that an artist cannot be satisfied with the outer beauty. He must see the inner side of man and things. Hence come the fantastic figures. Fantastic figures are parts of human mind. He has studied human face from various angles. One cannot fail to notice their softness, their liveliness and crookedness at the same time.

Even his realist landscapes shine in inner glows. The beauty of the landscapes lies in the expression of hidden spirit.

Indian literature and legends are full of stories of fantastic figures, not only of gods and goddesses but also of animals. Human mind created them out of necessity. As Tagore remarked: 'There are other factors of life which are visitors that come and go. Art is the guest that comes and remains. The others may be important but art is inevitable.'

The reason is that these fantastic figures speak of an internal truth which is eternally fascinating. When we observe his 'Dol Purnima', we notice how he has sought to penetrate into the sheer beauty of the dancer by his superb colouring. The vital beauty is the strength of his painting. And he derived that strength from Indian tradition by which individuality is placed in a picture sacrificing scientific precision. So the picture becomes live though not realistic. According to Nandalal, Tagore used to follow the Indian way consistently.

That is true of his own painting and outlook. This further explains the attitude of Indian artists towards Modern art. In the fifties of 20th century U.S.A. succumbed to Modern art because of the psychosis of war. But Tagore up to early forties and Nandalal Bose till now has continued in the inner significance of art.

Nandalal has made it clear that Tagore was by his method an Indian artist following the Indian way of suggestiveness in two dimensions. He writes: 'In a picture the artist creates the language of undoubted reality, and we are satisfied that we see them. It may not be the representation of a beautiful woman but that of a commonplace donkey, or of something that has no external credential truth in nature but only in its own inner artistic significance.'

By choosing painting to supplement his poems, he removed the barrier between painter and poet, and rhythm in his painting was drawn from his poems. Nandalal has explained the point by drawing three figures of lions. The first one is a realistic picture, the second an Assyrian picture of suggestiveness and the third simply a line of rhythm. As an artist, he has pointed out, this is a laborious process learnt by artist during the process of his work. Tagore mastered this rhythm through his poems and music.

Hence rhythm becomes such a great factor in Tagore's painting. This explanation of Tagore's art by Nandalal is a lucid illustration of his own ideas on art.



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